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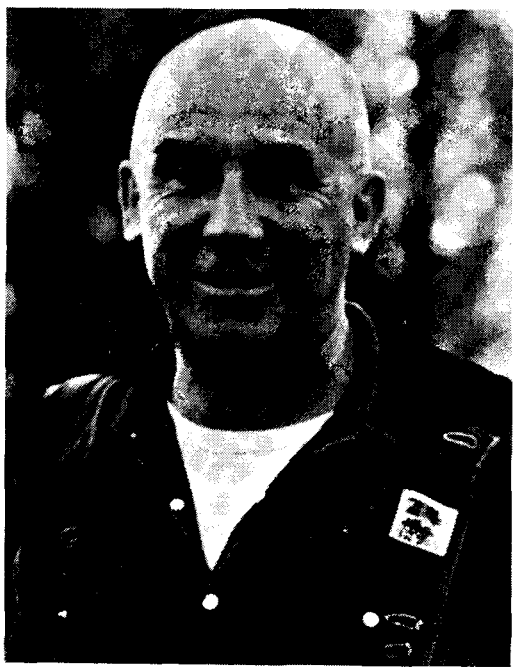
# commonweal

# THOMAS MERTON 1915-1968

*Excerpts*



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## A NATIVITY NARRATIVE

*Françoise Mallet-Jorris*

## LEFT-WING PATHOLOGY

*Leonard Kriegel*

## ON BARTH

*Harvey Cox*

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## *Wayne G. Pirtle on "After the Election"*

Merced, Calif.

*To the Editors*: In reading "After the Election" analyses [Nov. 29], I am more disturbed by what is not said than the actual content of the analyses. The authors have offered a complex array of data to support their interpretations of a complex problem—but there is always a danger that complex interpretations may eventually prove to be magnificently wrong. This is a situation that is a bit like two individuals shooting at a sparrow, one using a pellet gun and the other, a cannon. If they both miss, the impact of failure is greater for the one than the other. Instead of answering questions, it seems to me that the election of 1968 has only added additional questions about our national life and political institutions.

For example, what were the effects of the war in Vietnam on the election of 1968? As everyone knows, Nixon refused to discuss Vietnam and Humphrey offered little that diverged from President Johnson's war posture, while the Wallace-LeMay coalition indicated that they would give us lots more of the same in Vietnam. Under such circumstances where could the dovish segment of the electorate land? Undoubtedly many of the liberals finally voted for Humphrey—in the cautious hope that he would prove to be his old, liberal self in the future and think the "unthinkable" about Vietnam.

In the case of the dovish middle-of-the-roader—those millions of Americans who are thoroughly tired and disgusted with the war—the choice was more difficult. It they voted for Humphrey, the "mess" in Vietnam might drag on indefinitely—as it had during the last four years of the Johnson-Humphrey Administration. And if they voted for Wallace and LeMay, the war would probably get much worse before it got better. Finally, in the case of Nixon they had his oft-repeated statement, unclarified as it was, that he would end the war in Vietnam—perhaps in the tradition of Eisenhower's settlement of the Korean war in 1953.

In any case, the impact of the war in Vietnam remains as inscrutable as ever. As to which candidate actually profited or lost by the war issue—it is anybody's guess. The nagging question remains: did the doves eventually land and, if so, upon whom?

The authors of "After the Election" hardly touch the subjects of economics and prosperity, and yet it is virtually unprecedented that a political party is voted out of office during a period in which the average citizen is enjoying unprecedented affluence—albeit, in the paraphrased words of Marvell—at the heels of the winged chariot of inflation. At a time that the stock market is racing bullishly toward a record Dow Jones average of 1,000, the electorate chose to turn out of office the political party that helped the average investor realize a profit of 16 percent last year.

There is the additional irony that it was precisely the least affluent and the "traditional" poor among the ethnic minorities that voted most consistently for the party-in-power (a party that could reasonably be accused of perpetuating their poverty) and the new suburbanites, enjoying unprecedented prosperity, were precisely those who voted most heavily to turn their benefactors out of office. Here is one of several instances of the "Alice in Wonderland" quality of this upside down year of politics.

Among the election analyses there has also been little attention given to the new ascendancy of the vice-presidency. For generations, election to this office was considered a one-way ticket to political obscurity—unless, of course, the president died. However, since at least 1960, a vice-president appears to be in the best possible position to garner the presidential nomination for himself. All the front runners in the political drama of 1968, Johnson, Nixon, and Humphrey, held or had previously held the office of vice-president.

It was not so long ago that the U.S. Senate was considered a poor political base to launch an attempt to gain the presidency and then along came John F. Kennedy. Now the focus has shifted to the vice-presidency and as Nixon demonstrated in 1960 and Humphrey in 1968, if the vice-president has the backing of the president, he is virtually a shoo-in at the national convention. All of these developments contribute to an ominous feeling that we may not have seen the last of Spiro Agnew.

Then too, the analysts of election '68 ignored the emergence of a political grouping—at least as cohesive as the Democratic Party, if not the Republican—that has become the second largest political party in the country: the uncommitted electorate. These uncommitted voters make up an amorphous group that each candidate of both the Democratic and Republican parties must woo and win if either is to be elected. Yet the party of the uncommitted has no written platform or identifiable leadership. During the 1960's their numbers have grown dramatically and with their increasing size the question of how long a two-party system in this country can endure becomes ever more pertinent.

It has always been clear that there are sizable segments of liberals and conservatives in America—dramatically and disturbingly demonstrated by the 10-million votes which conservatives cast for Wallace in the election. However, the emergence of millions of voters without party affiliations is unprecedented and has induced candidates to seek feverishly for what this broad segment of the electorate feels and wants. Candidates find themselves in a Kafkaesque world where the only guides are pollsters who offer conflicting and ever-

WAYNE G. PIRTLE, *a division chairman at Merced College, Merced, Calif., has contributed to a number of national and professional journals, and is presently writing a college textbook in the social sciences for Random House.*



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changing reports of the attitudes and feelings of uncommitted voters.

This lack of "engagement" to the political values of either party offers candidates chronic dilemmas as to the issues to which they should address themselves. Under these conditions it is not surprising that both major political parties chose to nominate candidates who are most notable for their inviolate blandness.

With rare sagacity the Republican Party selected a man whose most remarkable characteristic is the facility with which he can change his values and commitments—chameleon fashion—to fit the mood of the times. Richard Nixon is a classic example of the contemporary personality of the general public writ small. An "engaged," committed politician finds it difficult to change his stripes with sufficient rapidity to exploit the tenor of the times; this was the inherent defect of Robert Kennedy's candidacy. In order for a candidate to appeal to the great throng of the uncommitted, he must also appear uncommitted. If this condition prevails, future presidential elections will continue to be contests between *blandopaths*.

Another moot question concerns the contribution made by television to the election '68. With an overlay of show-business values, television reporting consistently focuses national attention on the facets of American life that are most flamboyant, sordid, sensational and violent. Repeatedly the exhibitionists and violent few have been given center stage which tends, not only to distort the numbers and impact of such groups, but encourages others to seek the center stage by similar means. Many of the electorate, as a consequence, have become convinced that *all* universities are under chronic siege by Communists and anarchists, that "flower children" are more numerous than flowers, that smoking pot competes with baseball as the national pastime, and to be a black American is to be an inveterate social agitator. Here we encounter the disturbing but intriguing question as to whether the election

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# CHRISTIANS AND WAR

Draft czar Lewis Hershey does not much care for the American bishops' welcome although rather belated endorsement of selective conscientious objection, as contrasted with an all-embracing pacifism that rejects all war. "If you let the individual's conscience make that decision," General Hershey said, "I don't know where you are. You get over into the mundane area—the political area." The bishops, Hershey went on, were recommending "that an individual be permitted an objection to a single war without the necessity of objecting to all wars. But how can you have religion that says it's okay to kill one time but not another?"

General Hershey's last point hardly seems an overwhelming objection. Christians do in fact distinguish between different kinds of killing as a matter of course, and not only theologians but most citizens have little trouble distinguishing between, say, a killing by a policeman in self-defense and a cold-blooded murder by a private citizen. In the same way, Christian tradition, at least since the time of St. Augustine, has held that killing may be permitted in a just war but that it must be condemned in an unjust one. If his quoted comments accurately reflect his views, General Hershey seems totally unfamiliar with this tradition—although it must also be admitted that many and perhaps most Catholics are in little better shape.

On his first point, though, General Hershey raises a more serious question. It is true that selective conscientious objection would very often involve getting into "the mundane area—the political area." Indeed, this fact flows inevitably from the nature of Christian judgment on the justice or injustice of a particular war. Such a judgment necessarily concerns itself with questions like the purpose of a war, its necessity, the proportion between means used and ends sought, the chances for success, and the like. Just-war ethics



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are of necessity ethics of consequences, and this in turn implies political judgment. General Hershey or no, such political-moral judgment is precisely what is necessary. God stands in judgment over men and nations, and moral men in turn make reasoned judgments of their own actions. The principle of selective conscientious objection which the bishops endorsed, and which had previously been supported by the World Council of Churches, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, the Lutheran Church and other similar bodies, raises many practical problems, but there is no other course open unless we are to abandon moral judgment and totally surrender conscience to the state.

This, in fact, is what Christians in our time have too often done. How many voices were raised, in this country and in Germany, against Hitler's "final solution" to the Jewish question, at a time when protests might still have meant something? How many spoke out against the vindictive and politically disastrous policy of unconditional surrender? Where was the mass outcry that should have been produced by the obliteration bombing of Dresden and Hamburg or the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Why should there have been this sin of silence, in high places and low? Why, in particular, do American Catholics so often turn a decent love of country into a monstrous kind of idol-worship—a superpatriotism that would degrade the Church into a kind of religious American Legion?

Part of the answer, of course, is that American Catholics, at least those of the older generation, still tend to be hung up on their immigrant past. Because the loyalty of Catholics was often challenged by nativists of one stripe or another, Catholics reacted by beating them at their own patriotic game. To such Catholics, the efforts of the Catholic Worker and the Catholic Peace Fellowship are baffling, and the motives of a Dorothy Day or the Fathers Berrigan a total mystery.

To nationalism add the anti-Communism that has long been a ritualistic feature in American Catholic life, plus the usual exaggerated Catholic respect for authority, and the red, white and blue picture gets even more clear. The same unthinking mentality that led many Catholics to a total acceptance of the late Senator Joseph McCarthy in turn produced unquestioning acceptance of the Vietnam war. This is not to claim that evaluation of the war in terms of the traditional just war theory would lead to its automatic condemnation; it is to say, however, that too many Catholics accept the war without having made a serious moral evaluation.

It is this suspension of moral judgment that flies in the face of Christian tradition. The Church historically has always tried to restrain the resort to arms, to lessen and "civilize" violence, to reduce the horrors of war. St. Thomas replied in the negative when he asked himself if war was always sinful, but surely there is something significant about the very way he phrased the question. War is essentially repugnant to the Christian spirit; indeed, it can be justified only as a last resort. Thus the American bishops two years ago reminded Catholics of their obligation to work for peace: "In the spirit of Christ, the Christian must be the persistent seeker of the Gospel, the man willing to walk the second mile (cf. Matt. 5:42). He walks prudently, but he walks generously, and he asks that all men do the same." In this spirit, could not the Christmas truce in Vietnam become a Truce of God, as in medieval days? Could not the truce become a genuine and lasting cease-fire? Could Christians not make themselves be heard as one voice on this? As a selection from Thomas Merton elsewhere in this issue reminds us, the vocation of Christians is, above all else, to be peacemakers. How good that we should remember this, and how fitting that the reminder should come at Christmas.

## *In Memory of Karl Barth*

The death of Karl Barth did not come as a surprise. He was 82, and had been ailing for the past few years. Cynics might suggest that his theological obituary could have been written ten years ago, when the faint beginnings of the new radical theologies began to appear. Certainly the curmudgeonly old man who once wrote a book entitled *Against the Stream* would find most of his thoughts swimming against the current today also. His devastating theological critique of "religion," which probably inspired Bonhoeffer's call for a "non-religious interpretation of the Gospel," would now collide with the recently reawakened theological interest in the human phenomenon of religion. Also, Barth's architectonic approach to theology, his nearly incredible capacity for system-building would now swim against the present current. Theologians today, with few important exceptions, tend to steer clear of system-building and go at things topically.

Why will Barth be remembered? Oddly enough, he may be recalled in the long run as the man who, contrary to what secondary sources say, made man central to theological inquiry. Not man the titan, but man the co-worker with God. Not man the minor deity, but man the

### STAFF ADDITION

This week Philip Nobile joins the staff as an assistant editor. Mr. Nobile has graduate degrees from Boston University and the University of Louvain, and most recently has been serving as an editor for Herder and Herder. We are happy to welcome him to *Commonweal.*



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truly human creature for whom God has enormous expectations. Against existentialist individualizing and ultra-personalizing fashions in theology, however, Barth insisted that man becomes man only in radical communion with other men. Man is "co-man" (*mitmensch*) and Jesus Christ is God's revelation to us precisely because he is the man who is unreservedly for other men (". . . who for us men and for our salvation . . ."). We do not encounter God in our solitude, Barth always contended, but in solidarity with the suffering and celebration of other men in the real world. "God is *pro me*," he wrote, "only because he is *pro nobis.*"

Karl Marx as a young man once suggested that there come moments in the history of philosophy, especially after a great synthesizing system, when to continue to theorize reduces everyone to the status of Epigones. In such a situation, Marx said, philosophy must become the theory of practice, no longer merely seeking to understand the world but trying to change it.

After Karl Barth we may stand at just such a time in theology. We honor him not by refining or correcting his colossal and intellectually dazzling system, but by transmuting his insights from a mere commentary on our fallen world to a way of transforming and renewing it.

As we push on with this job we may discover to our surprise that the inspiration Barth gives comes not from his later, mellower, more "humanistic" period at all, but from his early *"Sturm und Drang"* pages—especially from *Epistle to the Romans*. Is God gone or dead?

Do we often reach out toward him and find only an endless mocking void? Barth not only knew this, he felt it and wrote about it with passion in the early 1920's. Do we sometimes feel trapped in the sticky immanence of spirituality and vacuous cultural religion? Barth screamed out against both in *Romans*—with a cry that jarred and terrified a generation. Do we now desperately require a God who cannot be tamed, housebroken or domesticated to anybody's national interest or psychological needs? Barth, like the Apostle John in Grünewald's "Crucifixion" pointed a long skinny finger at such a terrifying Christ four decades ago. *Ecce deus.*

Karl Barth was a lover of good wine, of old friends, of stimulating arguments, but mostly of the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. He once wrote in a collection of articles on Mozart that although the angels may sing Bach before the throne of grace, they undoubtedly sing Mozart when they are *en famille*. He also once told a friend with a wry twinkle that he hoped Anselm had gone to heaven and that he would too, because he wanted to have a long leisurely discussion with Anselm sometime about *cur deus homo.*

Who knows what the angels sing or where Anselm is? Or what happened to the vows, or theologies, of yesteryear? I only know that there are many of us so-called "younger theologians" (and the label gets progressively less suitable as we move into our forties) who, if there is a heaven or a hell, would just as soon go to one where Karl Barth is.

HARVEY COX

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**THE EXTRA DIMENSION**

# *HINTS ABOUT NIXON*

About a year after John F. Kennedy was killed, I asked some of his assistants about their White House experience. "The biggest surprise, and the biggest frustration, was the bureaucracy," one said. "We never realized how long it would take to get something done after we pushed the button in the White House—if it got done at all." This frustration plagues all presidents. The bureaucracy, the Congress, the opposition party, the public—they all place limitations on what a president can actually accomplish. The system of checks and balances often works. Even the titan Johnson was finally brought down by his congressional and public critics.

A president's main contributions, therefore, are often not specific actions but broad ideas. His importance rests in considerable measure on the major themes he enunciates—themes which influence not only the public life of the nation but its private life as well. President Kennedy, for instance, had great difficulty with Congress and at best a mixed record on foreign policy. But what distinguished his presidency were certain ideas that made him the harbinger of a modern, post-Cold-War world.

Kennedy was a man of flexibility. He listened to new proposals and methods, and he scuttled some of the hoariest myths that had strangled government for decades. One prominent example was economics. In the face of considerable conservative criticism he accepted the Keynesian approach espoused by his chief advisor, Walter Heller, and helped make possible an unparalleled record of prosperity. His openmindedness inspired others. Students began to speak out on such issues as nuclear testing in part because, as one student told me at the time, "there is a man in the White House who will at least listen to us."

Lyndon Johnson will also be remembered for one basic idea: his conviction that America was all-powerful. Johnson did as much for the poor as any modern president, but that record will always be overshadowed by the consequences of his arrogance and egotism. And it seems possible that his reliance on military power in Vietnam helped create an atmosphere in this country in which



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some students now see force as the only way to push a variety of demands on university and public officials.

Thus it is important to see what broad themes are being developed by Richard Nixon, what turn of mind seems to dominate his statements and actions. So far at least two concepts, one in foreign policy and one in domestic affairs, have emerged during the campaign and the post-election period. And both are disturbing.

Nixon illuminated the first concept when he said during the campaign that the United States must have superiority in nuclear weapons, and not accept parity with the Soviet Union. His adamant opposition to a coalition government in Vietnam flows from the same attitude. What Nixon is saying is that the United States should not deal with other nations as equals, but as inferiors. While Johnson felt that American power *was* superior, Nixon seems to believe that it *should* be superior.

If the postwar era teaches one lesson, however, it is that parity is the only feasible basis for a foreign policy. We cannot dominate other countries, we have to deal with them as equals. If Nixon tries to increase America's nuclear capability—a capability most experts believe is more than adequate to deter any attack—he will only precipitate a costly and dangerous arms race. The Soviet Union just will not stand for American superiority, nor will anyone else. France and most of Europe will no longer accept American economic domination. In Vietnam, Hanoi will abide by no solution that allows Saigon and its allies to dominate a new government, and our military record makes it obvious that we can't impose one. Only a coalition of equals is feasible.

The principle of parity is very difficult for men like Nixon, shaped by World War II and its aftermath, to accept. It is often a very messy and imprecise policy; for example, in Laos. Problems are not eliminated, but accommodated. Moreover, the principle militates against the myths of American physical power and moral rectitude. It says not only that we cannot impose our values on others but that we should not try. But the principle of parity is essential. In this world, there is more safety in balance than in strength; there is more hope for peace in equality than in victory.

The second major theme enunciated by Nixon involves his attitude toward urban problems in general and the black man in particular. His answer is to turn the problem over to private industry, a solution that is badly flawed for two reasons. First, enormous government subsidies would be necessary before industry spends any money on the cities. More important, the emphasis on private industry belies a very narrow view of the black problem. It is a view which says that all a black man needs is a job, and perhaps a house. But even if Nixon's "black capitalism" schemes work (whatever they are), and that job is provided by a black employer, Nixon's approach largely ignores both the psychological and political facets of the problem.

Despite enormous deficiencies, the antipoverty program, particularly the community action division, has made a significant impact on this country. In many cities, federal money has enabled black communities to organize themselves into cohesive forces. The process of organizing itself has helped bolster a sense of pride and self-confidence among blacks. And the organizations have become potent political vehicles through which blacks are asserting themselves in public life.

This is obvious in the current controversy over decentralization of the New York City schools. Practically every black leader and group which has stood up to the enormously powerful educational bureaucracy has benefitted from federal antipoverty funds. Much money was wasted; but some of it helped give voice to the poor communities.

Nixon's advisors are well aware of the impact, and the future potential, of the community action program. Spiro Agnew warned recently that the professionals, not the poor, would control antipoverty programs during the Nixon Administration. When Strom Thurmond dropped by to see the President-elect he told reporters that funds for the Office of Economic Opportunity should be cut back. "Down my way they're using antipoverty money for political purposes," said Thurmond, implying that politics was at best an immoral activity and probably a perverted one. "And I hear they're doing the same thing with it in other areas."

I remembered a conversation with William Haddad while he was working for Sargent Shriver in the early days of OEO. "There is a race on between the politicians and the poor people," he said. "As soon as the politicians realize how big a threat community action is to them, they'll try to kill it. The big question is whether people can get organized first." From the looks of things, the politicians are in the lead, and Richard Nixon is the only man judging the winner.

A lot about Nixon is still unclear. His appointments, for example, have been mixed. Henry Kissinger is at least a sensible man (in a way that Walt Rostow was not), but William Rogers has a reputation as an amiable milquetoast and Melvin Laird as a malevolent schemer. Daniel Moynihan is a surprisingly good choice but he will probably be very frustrated in his job of overseeing domestic programs. Robert Finch seems completely dedicated to Nixon's idea of slashing federal spending on urban prob-

## COMING

Saul Maloff, novelist, critic and former Books Editor of *Newsweek,* will begin a regular literary column by taking on the monster anthology, *How We Live: Contemporary Life in Contemporary Fiction.* Maloff wins.



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lems and acquiesced in Gov. Reagan's campaign to destroy the University of California. John Mitchell, the new attorney general, could be the most dangerous appointment of all. Only the courage of Ramsey Clark has thwarted the repression of blacks, students, political dissenters, accused criminals, and other relatively defenseless groups. Mitchell, whose law firm expends considerable effort ministering to the interests of Pepsi-Cola and promoted the "law and order" theme in Nixon's campaign, has never been accused of championing the underdog. For his White House staff, Nixon seems to have recruited mainly advertising men. It would be funny if it did not reinforce one's worst suspicions about Nixon's penchant for never being candid if he can possibly help it. In case the former barkers for Disneyland who now handle press relations let the real Nixon peep through, Herb Klein has been installed as Chief Obfuscator. Filtering through the haze, however, come some hints about what kind of president Richard Milhous Nixon will be. And they are not encouraging. STEVEN V. ROBERTS

*(Steven V. Roberts covers politics for the* New York Times *and writes frequently for periodicals.)*

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**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

# UP-TIGHT LITTLE ENGLAND

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Looking at America from England, one is struck by the scale of American political change: the new Administration brings into government thousands of unknown names, hundreds of policymakers who before had been Wall Street lawyers or corporation officers or midwestern newspapermen. The Democrats have for eight years tightened their natural links with the universities and the semi-public institutions of philanthropy and public affairs; of necessity a Republican president must, to considerable degree, go outside these circles of established public men. This can produce amateurism in office, naiveté and administrative blundering for a time, but it also provides a drastic change in the intellectual climate of Washington and, if we are very lucky, some serious new ideas, serious innovation.

The contrast with Great Britain is very great because the British system requires that new governments cast a far smaller net. Appointments are far fewer in number, the permanent civil service more important, the new cabinet drawn entirely from Parliament. The Opposition's shadow government is largely made up of former cabinet officials. Even in Opposition these men are more closely involved with the executive issues of government than American Senators of the opposition party. Indeed, for an American, remaining in the Senate may be far more attractive—and offer more real power—than a cabinet appointment, which is not true for a Member of Parliament.

The British system has clear advantages, but clear disadvantages as well, when, as is the case now, the nation senses itself politically frustrated, deprived of real alternatives, both Tories and Labour tried and found wanting. Those who have despaired of the Labour government today have often enough despaired of the Conservatives as well. What serious change, what alternative, does Mr. Heath offer? Talking with Conservative M.P.s, even the most imaginative of them, confirms this impression of exhausted choices which I believe is widely felt among the British public. The Conservatives would adjust taxes, increase management and entrepreneurial incentives, do 'better' what Labour already is doing, perhaps build a new aircraft carrier and reassert an East of Suez political-military role (why remains a trifle vague), go on trying to get into Europe. . . . But of course the French may not let them into Europe. But that might change. And anyway the American tie remains and perhaps a North Atlantic trading community could take Europe's place—which would make everybody feel better anyway. Not that they are not committed to Europe, you understand, but still Britain has been badly treated and it would be good to show the continentals that Britain doesn't really need Europe after all.

This last, this renewed doubt about Europe mixed with some anger, can be sensed quite as much—perhaps more—among Labour Party people as among Conservatives. The British sense of separation from Europe, of really being very different, has resolutely been suppressed for the past few years as Great Britain tried sincerely to join the Common Market, but now the effort has become a little strained. People in and out of government are cross but also very frustrated. What can Britain do? Become the fifty-first state? I have heard this half-seriously mentioned; better the Yanks than the Froggies and the Woggies anyway. And the burst of bitterness over German intransigence about revaluing the mark last month was really very sharp: who won the war anyway?

Politics here have gone rather sour, and there may, I suspect, be a rather drastic change when change eventually comes. This is why the Enoch Powell case is interesting. The real opposition party in Great Britain today is Enoch Powell—the Tory rebel, dismissed from the Conservative shadow cabinet and under serious bipartisan attack for his alleged racism. The serious press and the leadership of the major parties are virtually unanimous in criticism of Powell; yet it is a curiously guarded criticism and Po-



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well's support—to judge from the conversations I have been able to have here—is quite wide, even among those who condemn him on particular grounds. I have heard repeatedly, and from an unexpected range of formal viewpoints, that Powell is no doubt outrageous in what he says but also that he is more right than wrong.

He is right, people add, on race—the very issue on which the attack on Powell concentrates. His economic views, which involve an unfashionable and rather rigid commitment to free-market mechanisms, run into academic opposition but, more important, they challenge the assumptions about state welfare and social planning which today are an uneasily defended principle of both Labour and Conservative parties. The welfare state issue now has an odd status in British debate. British welfare measures actually are no more drastic than those in the major West European countries, and in some respects are inferior. Yet they are commonly put forward—by both their defenders and their critics—as the reason, or rationalization, for Britain's economic lag. Britain is socially advanced, progressive, the Left says, but also many Conservatives; far better this than cutthroat French or German capitalism with all their squalid prosperity. But both Left and Right today seem faintly—and rightly—uncomfortable with this argument. And this, I suspect, is an important development.

Powell's little-England nationalism (America, he significantly remarked after his only trip here, is the most foreign country he has ever visited) is also criticized but is also—I suspect—a sentiment latent below the surface of British opinion. If something should tip the political balance, so that Powellism suddenly seemed politically *possible,* a surge of opinion towards him might be liberated, surprising even to Britons who didn't know that they believed these things at all. What this nationalism could mean, if the European as well as the American options were repudiated, I simply do not know. Powell's present view is that Britain's future lies with Europe, that Britain is a European power. But the British are deeply frustrated today, and there is a great deal of anger which could be unleashed against France and Germany, and even against America.

For the moment it is the immigration issue which has catapulted Powell into prominence. On Nov. 16 he made the second of his major statements on race and immigration, a considerably more provocative one than the speech early this year which called for a halt in immigration from Asia and the Caribbean. His position then was that the racial homogeneity of British society was threatened. His argument, in itself, can be defended: the record of the Anglo-Saxon nations inspires little confidence in their ability to accept a multi-racial society, so why enlarge for Britain a problem which could tear it apart? But Powell expressed himself in terms which connived at racism, making use of the familiar device of citing horrible cases of immigrant behavior with a penultimate caution that most immigrants are, of course, nonetheless decent chaps. . . . He didn't quite bring himself to say that some of his best friends were West Indians.

The November speech again made use of this disreputable technique and raised a new substantive issue, that repatriation be encouraged both by preventing families from joining immigrants and by economic inducements—rewards; and pressures?—for immigrant citizens to leave. This, of course, raises important civil liberties issues and would establish a form of legal or administrative discrimination among British citizens on racial grounds.

The press and party reaction was still more harsh to this speech than to the earlier one, and I was inclined to think that Powell had offended that popular sense of civil liberty, of *fairness,* which still is so considerable here. Yet there are signs that this is not so. It is important to realize that there is in Great Britain no inheritance of guilt over racial discrimination. There is no history of slavery (only of the slave trade, to be sure, but this has little popular force), or of mass discrimination, or of legal and institutional racism. Race is a new problem. Reaction, essentially racist in form, is for a very wide range of ordinary Englishmen, quite reasonable and respectable. The colored are foreigners of recent arrival; their manners and standards are alien and upsetting to what has been a socially rigid and fairly xenophobic society anyway; let them go back where they—freely—came from. Even from what, in America, would be considered very liberal circles, I have heard that "Enoch, of course, is right. He's gone a bit far but it had to be said. And of course he will ease back a bit when his time comes to make his bid for the Tory leadership."

So Powell seems to me the most significant political figure in Britain at present, and also a very interesting one. For all that he has done to connive at racism, there is also a Cromwellian, a morally puritan, air to him. Just as Britons can be "reasonably" racist without guilt, Powell, as an intellectual and, I think, a morally serious man, can exploit the issue and regard himself—as he clearly does—as performing an act of moral courage. And he is an intellectual, an interesting one—a classical scholar, an historian of the early development of Parliament, a serious economist and political theorist. His public *persona* is puritan, humorless—which is more than a little disquieting. I am told that this is not his private character. It is not simply ambition that is driving him on—although he has ambition enough (supposedly when he joined the army as a private soldier at the beginning of the war he determined to master the military arts and end as a brigadier—which he did). He is an ambiguous figure, but he has made himself Britain's real opposition leader on a range of issues considerably—and potentially—wider than immigration. At a time when the established parties and policies are so thin, and the established political men seem so disheartened and demoralized, Powell—whoever and whatever he is—must be taken very seriously. WILLIAM PFAFF



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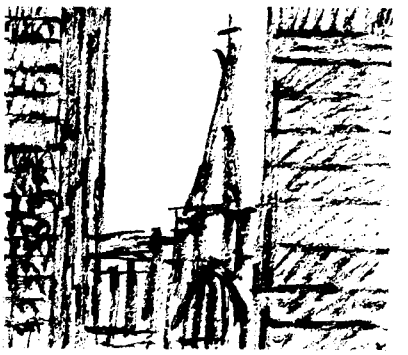
# A NATIVITY NARRATIVE

*Notes on a writer's encounter with Christ*

FRANÇOISE MALLET-JORRIS



As a child, I do not believe I ever heard the name of Christ pronounced in our home, or heard any member of the family evoke the possibility of a religiously oriented life—except to criticize it. The only religious person among my relations was my maternal grandmother, a very old, very mild and very quiet lady, of whom it was said with a sort of indulgent pity: she goes to church a lot, or, she is very pious. But her behavior was neither discussed, nor criticized; it seemed to be simply understood: at her age such is quite natural. This is what made religious practice appear to me like a custom of old people, or of certain families, a distinguishing mark without great interest, characterized, in the aged, by keeping a pile of little medals in a purse (my grandmother had many of them, not counting a tiny statue of St. Anthony in a case, to which she appealed when she lost something). In the case of children, the sign was evidently the First Communion, received in a white dress with a veil. This ceremony made me a little jealous, but not too much. I recall a small classmate asked me if I was not making my First Communion; I answered her, like the reasonable child I was, that as for me, I had had a winter vacation. For I considered these were pleasures of the same order and that you could not have everything.

The only figure of Christ that I knew in childhood was the Infant Jesus who appeared at Christmas. Still, there was no crib in our home, only a Christmas tree. The little Jesus was a child born on that day. Why we celebrated his birth I never quite knew; no doubt because he had been particularly well behaved. This absence of the figure of Christ, even the historic Christ, lasted nearly 20 years for me. If I came across his name in a text or read a Catholic author, a sort of amicable fog would seize my mind, keeping it in the same freedom from curiosity. Christ—that was for other people, a life style which was not mine; or even less, a literary theme, a figure you encounter in a schoolbook, and are not quite sure if he really existed.

It seems, however, that a child who is frequently bedridden will be attracted more than another by a form of interior life; and in the midst of my ignorance and incuriosity, I remember sometimes thinking, with a sort of instinctive and secret tenderness, of the Holy Virgin whose statues I had seen. But still, why this absence of curiosity, of questions? Did I perhaps already sense the necessity of a slow interior maturation which ought not be troubled? Perhaps I feared that talking would destroy this link, this so fragile link which attached me to the only notion of the good, of the beautiful, accessible to me: maternity?

A cleaning lady I had (she was Spanish, illiterate but very good and had suffered much) told me: I no longer believe in anything but the Child Jesus, him, I believe in.

—And why the Child?

—Oh! afterward, he grew up . . . , she said with a disillusioned gesture. Her lack of confidence in men left her only this recourse to the Child Jesus, to the childhood of faith. In any case, the first blind movement which carried me toward the Virgin was not yet a movement of faith, but it was nonetheless a movement of love. It had to sleep for a long while.

I have been a writer for as long as I can remember. Poems and stories first; then when I was 15 a publisher friend of my parents printed some of my poems; at 20 I had a novel published. One thing simply followed another without any choosing on my part. I had not asked myself about the profession of writing; I had not interrogated myself on the meaning of what was long since the old

FRANÇOISE MALLET-JORRIS, *author of* Signs and Wonders *(Farrar, Straus) and other novels, has received several literary awards. Her article was adapted from a talk at the 1968 Semaine des Intellectuels Catholiques.*



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habit of a somewhat solitary child often kept at home. A certain success gained by this first book somehow gave my habit a public sanction, a social existence, and I passed abruptly from a prolonged childhood to the status of adult with no time to get my bearings. A crisis was inevitable. I had always written for myself, without reflection, without complications. Even the publication of that little volume of adolescent poems had been only a kind encouragement, such as parents give to children when they have produced a pretty drawing or a page of good penmanship. It was an act of no consequence, certainly unwarranted. All at once, because this first, slight novel stirred up a little interest, because several words were written about it in a newspaper, because, above all, it earned a little money—that affair of adults—this deed had an existence for others, and was going to continue to exist independently of me.

I still remember passing before the church of St. Germain-des-Près the day I signed my first contract. I had a small check in my pocket, and was in a dazed state which was not entirely joyful. Since the others, those who were still the grown-ups for me (I was not, in a certain fashion, very advanced for my age), gave money to read the words which I had written in a kind of drifting dream, did this mean my words were of some value to them? Some meaning? How to know which? How to know if the density these words suddenly acquired was the same for them and for me?

### *The Power of Words*

I immediately rediscovered a very ancient concern—encountered for the first time one day when I was a very young child. I had told a lie to a schoolteacher and she had believed it. If I had spoken the truth, would she not have been able to believe it as easily? There was no way to tell the difference. Child that I was, I had wept over this incommunicable truth. And then I forgot it.

Suddenly, on account of this first book, I had rediscovered that terrifying sense of power and powerlessness. I had in my hands an instrument, but I did not know how to use it. I possessed a power, modest as it was, but I did not know what to make of it. Between what I instinctively, non-reflectively, wrote, and that which the reader understood, what a gap was possible! And yet what a gap between me and myself!

The crisis was not sudden. The anxiety had to grow slowly, to the extent that my work became harder, that I weighed my words, in the literal sense, that is, that I felt their weight. This anxiety, this need for a truth which would not be betrayed, the difficulty of establishing this truth by myself necessarily led me, very slowly, step by step, toward Christ, teacher of the Word.

Important events, I believe, happen in their own time, and often with an extreme simplicity, apparently by chance. For a long time I owned a Bible. I must have been 12 when a classmate had given it to me. I had found the gift a little eccentric, unusable. I had kept it, I thought, in memory of a friendship which was nonetheless long forgotten. Although I read many books, I had not read that one. It gave me the impression of a school book, and one not on the reading list. Suddenly, at 22, I opened it. I had taken 10 years to perform this act. And once begun (though I would cast it aside and take it up more than once), the book would not allow itself to be again forgotten. For me Christ was now made living; he was a man who had used words, the most everyday of words, to express a truth which he affirmed was universal. And this truth which was possible to apprehend, to fix with words, he, this man who had really lived at a certain time in history, he said that this truth was also the Life. On account of this Man, the work of words ceased to be a daydream, an embroidery, a decoration of an interior emptiness. It was engaged directly with life; it was linked with all human activities. For a person who practiced since childhood a solitary's pastime, my work suddenly opened onto fraternity.

Conversion begins like that for many, it seems to me; it is an encounter with a man before it is an encounter with God. It is a word which, first convincing us and touching us, we yet dare only to half-believe. It is a language, at once the simplest and the most universal, whose secret we attempt to plumb. Can it be that with a vocabulary so humble, similes so ordinary, these parables introduce us imperceptibly into another dimension, into a more real world? Through the humanity of the Christ whom we have encountered and heard like any one of us, his divinity begins progressively to appear. Through language, realities which transcend language progressively begin to be manifested. Through fraternity itself, communion emerges.

In reading the Gospel, which I had the privilege (because I believe that it is a privilege) to discover with a fresh eye, what struck me next was the recognition that I was suddenly the recipient of an extreme liberty. I could have thought, perhaps I had thought, that this new faith was going to reduce me, limit me. How many times did I not hear unbelievers ask me: But, all the same, do you feel free to write what you want? And I have a great deal of trouble explaining to them the extraordinary revelation of Christian liberty in Christ.

The choice of a lifework appears at once so complicated and so limited if you restrict it to the time and means which befall us. I reflected on this profession I had chosen almost without realizing it. Was it a true vocation? Did not the fact that I had been pushed there by a chain of circumstances deprive it of value? Thus the first approach of Christ deepened an anxiety which a second stage of reflection was to dissipate. Since my work was linked with all other human activities, participated in the same quest, what did it matter whether or not it had been chosen? Each rereading of the Gospels satisfied me more,



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suggested a new teaching, which appeared scaled to my energies. And the extreme diversity in unity which I found there was an endless revelation. To the parable of the buried talents responded that of the lilies of the field. The Pharisee and the Publican completed the guests who did not attend the wedding banquet. And all the contradictions were resolved in the cry of him who demanded from Jesus a miracle: "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!"

*The Christian Community*

So, by means of the parables, this astonishing and subtle panorama of the human being's every mental attitude, I discovered more and more the liberty in unity which St. Augustine expressed in a single phrase, "Love, and do what you will."

From this encounter, I first knew nothing but joy. If faith was later enriched and took on its weight of flesh in the course of the trials and difficulties it encountered, I believe that after such a discovery of faith, one can never forget that it is, before all else, the Good News. Even if we never rediscover the wonder of the first moment, the sudden expansion of spirit and of awareness beyond the narrow limits of our individuality is unforgettable. The God who made himself man so that we would encounter him has scorned nothing, because he has not scorned to become like us. He has not chosen some, disregarded others, indicated formidable paths, spoken an esoteric language. He knew friendship, he blessed the innocent joy of the marriage at Cana, he even, as Bernanos has so nicely painted it, savored the naive triumph of palms. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, as our Creed says. In each of our joys, in each of our pains, he is the friend who has experienced that before us. What difference, then, our superficial choices next to the only choice which counts and which we will rediscover everywhere.

But by the very fact that we will rediscover Christ everywhere, everything concerns us. All is fraternal, is open. We are imprisoned no more in our race, our craft, not even in our psychology or our temperament. These particularities are only instruments, and of what importance is the form of an instrument compared to the use one puts it to? Neighbor, friend, brother of each of us, by his incarnation, Christ makes us all neighbors, friends and brothers, one of another. Through a man, I have been led to encounter God. Through God, I was able to re-encounter men, now become members of my family.

No doubt, some recognize this membership, others do not. The latter are no less my brothers, but it is among the former that I believe myself called to live. I think that it is impossible for a Catholic by birth, or by family tradition, to realize the idyllic image which a convert has of the Christian community. Without any idea of the difficulties he is going to meet, it seems to him that he is going to be able to address his words to all his new brothers, that he will be at home in every place, that he will find there the same enthusiasm (a little hasty perhaps).

It would be needlessly mean and unjust to state only that he is disappointed. But nevertheless, what will impress him most, it seems to me, in this Church he longs to join, is not at all hostility, or rejection, but a kind of silence. After a political rally, where you are all (theoretically) of the same opinion, you talk, you sympathize with one another. In the metro, during the holiday period, when you are crushed against strangers who lift bizarre-shaped packages over their heads (a tricycle, a precious vase), you exchange smiles. A complicity, a fraternity, superficial perhaps but consoling nonetheless, is felt. A convert—me—expects to find something of that in the Church, at Mass, in the parish. After Mass, there is no talking to one another, except for those who are with the same small group; if someone smiles amiably at a person he doesn't know, he provokes an astonished jump.

Beginning with a purely instinctive work, as in that game of constructing a logical drawing from some lines jotted at random, I have arrived at this need for sharing, for gifts offered and received, which necessarily engages me totally in a conviction: that this communication, this communion, was not a secondary need or demand of faith, but indeed a deep and vital necessity, which, in a certain fashion and at the level of the simplest believer, grounds the very reality of the Church as community. It is all together, in the charity of exchanges, that Christ is present among us.

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ROBERT WALLACE

## *FROM ACROSS THE BAY*

Egrets, icy on storm-ink blue
that darkens lightly every instant,
thread homeward, flapping, in straggling lines,
in bunches. They are as startling white

as the waves the wind lips on the bay's
black-green toward us, their great wings leafing
air as they come long-leggedly dropping
into the pale salt-marsh's tufty

wind-row cedars, to sit like candles
on the storm's limbs, white, wind-fluttered.
The rain when it comes will drench them,
the dark pinch them out, as it batters

and wrestles runneling at our windows.
Clearings hacked by lightning will show
them—wet, white half seconds—still there:
asleep, waiting, a kind of certainty.



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*The Dutch treatment*

# PATHOLOGY ON THE LEFT

LEONARD KRIEGEL

Recently I took part in a panel discussion for students at the University of Groningen in Holland. The discussion was sponsored by Aktie Precedent, a Dutch group which harvested some publicity on both sides of the Atlantic for its thesis: the U.S. is so powerful that non-Americans ought to have a share in the election of the President. It thus asked that Europeans mail the *New York Times* cards expressing their opinions on U.S. problems and the election. The assumptions underlying this approach are undoubtedly debatable. Most questionable is the role ascribed to the American President, who is as much the prisoner of his society's myths as he is their creator. The idea that extending the franchise will ensure better presidential candidates is certainly open to question. Racism in England, for instance, differs from racism in the United States in degree rather than in kind. And finally, America's surrender of nationalism would, of necessity, have to be accompanied by an equal Russian, Chinese and even European surrender, a fact which Aktie Precedent acknowledges but rather uncomfortably skirts.

My original reaction to Aktie Precedent was quite natural. Like most Americans, I am deeply suspect of any group which sets itself up as moral arbiter for another country. And I now find myself extremely wary of anything which is utopian or idealistic. The group, for instance, seeks "the radical alteration of the entire world political system." Yet it is exactly this, upon reflection, which seems so necessary, especially during a time when the virulence of nationalism has become so great that even radical intellectuals—in order, one suspects, to be in touch with the times—unhesitatingly embrace it. Like most of my friends and colleagues, I have managed to accommodate myself to the idea of healthy, competitive nationalisms, an idea which possesses more and more appeal for intellectuals as they become less and less capable of creating alternatives to it. To confront a group of people who believed that, however difficult the prospect of success, the world must again turn to radical change that runs counter to nationalistic change, now seems decisively meaningful. This was the reason I agreed to take part in the panel discussion.

Unfortunately, Aktie Precedent must find a political base. Its natural base would seem to be the young Dutch left. But the mindlessness of the young Dutch left is apparently equal to the mindlessness of that part of our own New Left which is content with simplistic surges of impassioned rhetoric designed to ward off the witches and warlocks of analysis and complexity. One wonders whether the opiate of the masses may not yet prove to be the voodoo of the intellectuals. Like its American counterpart, the *Nieuwe Links* in Holland does not seem particularly interested in critical analyses of nationalism; it has its slogans and its chants (there is a cafe in Amsterdam where students chant the sayings of Chairman Mao in unison: one more tourist attraction to place beside the redlight district and the tulips for *les Américains*) and it demands the gut reaction rather than the clarification of perception and the formulation of issues.

II

The meeting took place before a full house of approximately 400 students. With my wife, I entered the Groningen Corn Exchange, a rather handsome nineteenth century embodiment of the Dutch mercantile instincts which built it. We were both startled to see the oversized grim, determined face of Lyndon Johnson staring at us from a wavering black plastic screen, so creased and ridged that it made the face even more sullen, even more surreal. Strangely enough, there was little reaction from the students. One boy sitting next to my wife, his rather thick face gentled by a wispy medieval beard, shouted, "How many kids did you kill today?" Then he laughed and nudged the boy next to him with his elbow. One had the impression that he was practicing his English.

Occupying the platform along with me were a student leader of Aktie Precedent, a member of the Polemological Institute at Groningen, and a Dutch-American professor of chemistry. After the intermission, we were joined by a journalist from the radical weekly *Vrij Nederland* and a member of the theology department at the university who took over the job of moderator.

The speaker from the Polemological Institute, a physicist, offered a rather long indictment of the United States, He spoke of the "domino theory" as if it were the latest justification of our Vietnam policy and he seemed to conceive of the "brain drain" as some heinous American crime against which both European purity and the third

LEONARD KRIEGEL, *a professor of English at City College of New York, is presently in Europe on a study grant.*



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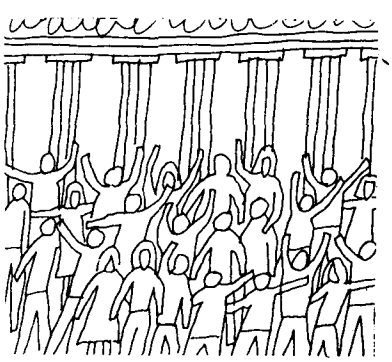
world had to be protected. In a sense, he illustrates the extent to which anti-Americanism (a rather inadequate word to describe a complex body of feeling and logic) is itself a prison. Rather than indict the society where it is most culpable—in its racism, its outmoded political structure which offers inadequate power for those who need power most, its imperialism—he was most passionate about the "brain drain." (When I later suggested that the "brain drain," if it exists, was the fault of European universities and industries, the students enthusiastically applauded.)

When my turn to speak came, I suggested that it might be advisable to criticize America for what it is rather than for what the Dutch would like it to be, and that the European tendency to mythicize American politics and politicians made such a task especially necessary. Racism, for instance, was at the present time destroying the country. From the point of view of white America, both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King had succeeded only in forcing the nation back into new justifications of its fears and anxieties. Unfortunately, few Europeans were in a position to condemn America on the score of racism. While I was speaking, four young men, each of whom looked as if he had spent a bad night spinning through the bars of MacDougal Street, walked down the center aisle. One carried a washboard, another carried a drum. The leader, a tall thin young man with the inevitable stoned eyes and dirty long hair, seated himself Indian-style in front of the audience. His three cohorts surrounded him. After a wait of around five minutes, the leader jumped up, shoe in hand, and then began pounding wildly on the floor. No one in the Corn Exchange seemed surprised. Someone on the panel whispered, "Neo-provo," half to himself, half to the rest of us. His style was a curious mixture of Hitler and Khrushchev—incoherent shouting followed by spasms of coherence, banging his shoe on the ground, jumping up and down, lips already flecked with spittle—which he seemed to have put together from old films and TV scraps. None of us, not even the Dutch, could make out what he was saying but his general drift was carried through in the question he repeated over and over again, *"Is het wel of niets?"* (More or less, "Put up or shut up.") Later, he began to scream this again. But this time the moderator asked him the Dutch equivalent of "Put up or shut up about what?" This pulled him up short and one felt the naked pity of it all. Like a child whose tantrum has been interrupted, he stood there, lips flecked with foam, face like soggy plastic, seemingly on the verge of collapsing into tears. At this point he turned to me and, in a pleading voice, said, "I cannot English." While he performed, I studied the faces of the audience. For the most part, they were bored, as if this were a scene they had witnessed far too often. But a few faces, most conspicuous among them one that looked as if it had been argued over by Breughel and Memling, nodded in some kind of rhythmical agreement with the shouts, the drumming, and the pounding shoes. At such meetings, no one apparently challenges you if you are high enough.



### *Rear-Guard Action*

Although I finished speaking and the interruption was unsuccessful in breaking up the meeting, from that moment on Aktie Precedent in Groningen was fighting a rear-guard action. Although it was 11 P.M. before the meeting was actually broken up, these boys had succeeded far earlier than that in focusing the crowd's attention on them rather than on what Aktie Precedent was trying to do. And here, it seems to me, we must face an issue which the Left in Holland, like the Left in America, has tended to dismiss for far too long: the question of what a radical constituency represents. For a movement like Aktie Precedent to become meaningful, it is going to demand a great deal of intensive, even boring, work on the part of the people it is trying to reach. But the radical has been excusing pathological exhibitionism for so long now that he probably is no longer able to see it for what it is. To speak of the kind of exhibition that this boy was putting on as the reaction of a politically sensitive nature to our times is absurd. But it is in just this way that we have been excusing such behavior. One of the fundamental assumptions of the Left, both in Europe and America, has been the distinctive quality of the pathology of the Right. But sickness is not just the product of the Wallaces among us. Orwell, Koestler, even Zamyatin warned us that this was not the case and that if we did not listen we would eventually be forced to pay a terrible price: we are paying that price now. In the United States, where survival itself may be the price, the radical massages himself with the public neuroses of the Yippies; he constructs theories about the "purpose" of their tactics when such tactics are simply the crudest form of psychic masturbation. In Holland, life is relatively sane and rather secure, but if radicalism wishes to make any headway it is not going to do so with a group of emotional and intellecual misfits who, twenty-five years ago, would undoubtedly have opted for Seyss-Inquart's equivalent of the Hitler Jugend. The radical deludes himself into believing that he is living on the



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borders of consciousness when he is merely existing in a rather private and isolated terrain.

One could understand toleration of exhibitionism if it led to any results other than the strengthening of exactly what radicalism is supposed to weaken. But radicalism as another form of "kicks" seems to me futile. Even Camp should be genuine and I, for one, would prefer to watch old Superman serials on television. To apologize for the breakup of the meeting, as one of the students who had invited me did, with the line, "I guess that's what you have to live with in a democracy" indicates an inability to understand either democracy or radicalism.

The problem facing Aktie Precedent is the problem facing all radical and peace organizations in the West, the extent to which they can create a more livable world with priorities such as racial and economic justice, the democratization of life, the alleviation of the threat of holocaust. In the face of such massive problems, I, for one, find crusading for the legalization of pot a rather decisive waste of energy. And I am growing tired of movements which call themselves radical but do little more than serve as havens for grown children whose dress is as complex as their minds are simplistic, for sloganeers, for peddlers of whimsical positions who would have sent de Sade spinning into the arms of Cotton Mather, for all those who, in the name of personal liberty and freedom, have managed to make of politics a cloister in a circus.

Freud once said that each country gets the Jews it deserves. One could say the same of a country's political radicals. In Holland, one confronts a radical Left which depends upon the United States, that mythical country about which it always screaming, for its very "life style." The result is a radicalism that is stale and simplistic. To the credit of the people who conceived Aktie Precedent, they wanted to redirect our focus to one of the chief issues of our time (as well as one of the least discussed), the extent to which nationalism as a political force can be permitted to grow. But if what happened in Groningen is any indication, Aktie Precedent may have to settle for being one more political spectacle in a world grown weary of such spectacles. And this is to be regretted. One of the great virtues of the Dutch is their love of Holland combined with their peculiar absence of nationalism. In this, they have a lesson to teach us all. But what a job they have in our time—where Marx gives way to Rubin and the provos storm the Groningen Corn Exchange.

*'Young travelers are not taking their trip with Jesus'*

# MISSING THE YELLOW SUBMARINE

**CELIA HUBBARD**

Religion is where you find it, and it isn't strange that today, when authentic religious experience is so noticeably absent from the old familiar places, it should be popping up in new and off-beat ones. The voice of the prophet and mystic is heard in the land, but the voice does not belong to the Fulton Sheens, the Billy Grahams or Norman Vincent Peales. It belongs to the young folk singers, poets, playwrights, media-makers.

On the album cover of David Steinberg's record, "The Incredible Shrinking God," we read, "When ancestral kings corrupted their captains, and the Church blessed both captains and kings, the court jester got laughs simply by sniffing the troubled air, implying that the stink in the herring begins in its head. In our times, it isn't surprising to find men and women crowding the night clubs in hopes of seeing someone sniff the air. In such times clowns become witnesses."

Such "clowns" as the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, Leonard Cohen, the young authors of "Hair," and many more, are continually sniffing the troubled air. Today night club entertainers *are* preachers, protest *is* ritual, ceremonial, and folksingers *are* prophets and theologians for the Now generation. Speed kills and so does the Establishment. The young question their relationship to the structures of established society. Some reject it, some withdraw, others seek to change it. All feel more or less alienated; they are disturbed by the status quo, bogged down under the pharisaical bourgeois baggage. And in reacting, they have started what amounts to their own spiritual revolution.

The qualities and values most prized by this generation of young people are very similar. What does it mean in the fullest sense to be a human being? The innerspace odyssey begins in a personal search for self and/or God, an intensification of personal and interpersonal experience, authentic and meaningful relationships, not hung up with personal guilt in such a way as to make intimacy, openness and love impossible. Flexibility in an ever-changing environment, honesty, *(Continued on page 438)*

CELIA HUBBARD, *an artist and writer, is the Director of The Botolph Group, an organization fostering religious art.*



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## Prayer

But by the light of our December mornings,
Though words stand frozen in the voice's well
And all the country pumps are dumb,
Look where the landscape, like a white Cistercian,
Puts on the ample winter like a cowl
And so conceals, beneath the drifts of quiet
contemplation,
The ragged fences and the ravaged field. . . .

. . . November analyzed our bankruptcy, but now
His observations lie knee-deep beneath our Christmas
mercies:
While, folded in the buried seed,
The virtual summer lives and sleeps,
And every acre keeps its treasure like a kingly secret.

*From "Two States of Prayer"*
*April 12, 1946*

## Baptism

. . . How many deeps, how many wicked seas,
Went to befriend me with a flash of white-caps
Louder than laughter in the wind and sun,
Or sloggered all our brown bow's gunwale under
In their rowdy thunder:—
Only to return me to the land.
Do you suppose that if the green Atlantic
Had ever cracked our brittle shell,
And rifled all the cabins for their fruit of drunken
passengers,
Do you suppose my sins,
Once we were sorted and disposed forever
Along the shelves of that profound, unvisited museum,
Would there have been immune,
Or learned to keep their coats of unreality
From the deep sea's most patient candying?

*From "On the Anniversary of My Baptism"*
*April 12, 1946*

## Contemplative Life

THE term "contemplative life" is one that is much mistreated. It is more often used than defined, and that is why arguments about the respective merits of "active" and "contemplative" orders generally end nowhere. In the present article I am not talking about the contemplative orders, but about the contemplative life. It is a life that can be led and, in fact, must eventually be led by every good Christian. It is the life for which we were created, and which will eventually be our everlasting joy in heaven. By the grace of Christ we can begin to lead that life even on earth, and many in fact do so begin. Some of them are in cloisters, because the vows and rules of religious orders and congregations make the necessary work of preparation easy and, as it were, almost a matter of course. But many more "contemplatives" are out in the world. A lot of them may be found in places like Harlem and wherever people suffer, and perhaps many of these have never even heard the word "contemplative." And yet, on the other hand, not all of those who are in contemplative orders are contemplatives. Through their own fault they miss the end of their vocation. . . .

*From "Poetry and the Contemplative Life"*
*July 4, 1947*

# THOMAS MERTON 1915-1968

## Excerpts from Commonweal

## Christmas

IT IS a terrible thing, that no one of us should realize what it means that there has been a Christmas in our world.

Yet some of us will, perhaps, say: "We know what it is all about. Christ is born."

"So Christ is born! And what does that mean?"

"It means we are redeemed; it means we are saved."

"Is that all?"

"Christ is born! We are going to go to heaven!" And I say to you, it is a terrible thing that none of us should be able to realize what it means, that there has been a Christmas in our world.

Is this something that happens in every man's childhood? It happened in mine. Yours too, I suppose. One day (which was almost certainly not Christmas)



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without any apparent reason or occasion, you suddenly became conscious of who you were. Your identity came out like an image on a negative, and it was real with a new and unfamiliar kind of reality that was realer than anything you knew.

It was something you felt to be too important to tell anybody, so important that it was impossible to explain. . . .

You had discovered that you were a person. You knew who you were.

There was once conceived a Man to Whom this happened at the first second when He came into existence.

A human Soul, a will capable of unimaginably great love and a mind wide enough to take in infinity: a soul, mind and will, which had, a moment before, been nothing, had not existed, came into being because in the heart of a girl an almost unspoken assent was given to a movement of great grace.

And in the fraction of a second in which this Soul, in its Flesh, began to exist, the Man Who was so conceived was at once awake and saw, not vaguely, not in mystery, not with surmise or question, but saw clearly, and fully, and without being dazzled or frightened —saw Who He was.

He saw Who He was, because when He awoke out of nothingness He was gazing, with His whole Intellect into the Face of the Infinite Truth Who was at the same time His Father and Himself.

This Man, Who had never before existed, and had just begun to exist, saw, realized, fully grasped the meaning not of the words "I exist, I am myself," but: "I am God!" . . .

*From "A Christmas Devotion"*
*December 26, 1947*

## Art

ART and prayer have never been conceived by the Church as enemies, and where the Church has been austere it has only been because she meant to insist on the essential difference between art and entertainment. The austerity, gravity, sobriety, and strength of Gregorian chant, of twelfth-century Cistercian architecture, of Carolingian minuscule script, have much to say about the life of prayer, and they have had much to do, in the past, with forming the prayer and the religious consciousness of saints. They have always done so in proportion as they have freed souls from concentration upon themselves, as well as from mere speculation about technical values in the arts and in asceticism. One can be at the same time a technical expert in chant and a man of prayer, but the moments of prayer and of technical criticism do not usually coincide.

*From "Reality, Art and Prayer"*
*March 25, 1955*

## Ernest Hemingway

Now for the first time on the night of your death
your name is mentioned in convents, *ne cadas obscurum.*

Now with a real bell your story becomes final. Now men
in monasteries, men of requiems, familiar with the dead,
include you in their offices.

You stand anonymous among thousands, waiting in the dark
at great stations on the edge of countries known to
prayer alone, where fires are not merciless, we hope,
and not without end.

You pass briefly through our midst. Your books and
writings have not been consulted. Our prayers are
*pro defuncto N.*

Yet some look up, as though among a crowd of prisoners
or displaced persons, they recognized a friend once
known in a far country. For these the sun also rose
after a forgotten war upon an idiom you made great. They
have not forgotten you. In their silence you are still
famous, no ritual shade.

How slowly this bell tolls in a monastery tower for a
whole age, and for the quick death of an unready dynasty,
and for that brave illusion: the adventurous self!
For with one shot the whole hunt is ended!

*"An Elegy for Ernest Hemingway"*
*September 22, 1961*



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## Nuclear War

THE Christian is and must be by his very adoption as a son of God, in Christ, a peacemaker (Matt. 5:9). He is bound to imitate the Savior who, instead of defending Himself with twelve legions of Angels (Matt. 26:55) allowed Himself to be nailed to the Cross and died praying for His executioners. The Christian is one whose life has sprung from a particular spiritual seed: the blood of the martyrs who, without offering forcible resistance, laid down their lives rather than submit to the unjust laws that demanded an official religious cult of the Emperor as God. That is to say the Christian is bound, like the martyrs, to obey God rather than the state whenever the state tries to usurp powers that do not and cannot belong to it. . . .

We must remember that the Church does not belong to any political power bloc. Christianity exists on both sides of the Iron Curtain and we should feel ourselves united by very special bonds with those Christians who, living under Communism, often suffer heroically for their principles.

Is it a valid defense of Christianity for us to wipe out these heroic Christians along with their oppressors, for the sake of "religious freedom"? It is pure sophistry to claim that physical annihilation in nuclear war is a "lesser evil" than the difficult conditions under which these Christians continue to live, perhaps with true heroism and sanctity preserving their faith and witnessing very effectively to Christ in the midst of atheism. Persecution is certainly a physical evil and a spiritual danger, but Christ has said that those who suffer persecution in His Name are blessed. (Matt. 5:10-12). . .

It is vitally necessary that we form our conscience in regard to our own participation in the effort that threatens to lead us to universal destruction. We have to be convinced that there are certain things already clearly forbidden to all men, such as the use of torture, the killing of hostages, genocide (or the mass extermination of racial, national or other groups for no reason than that they belong to an "undesirable" category). The destruction of civilian centers by nuclear annihilation bombing is genocide. We have to become aware of the poisonous effect of the mass media that keep violence, cruelty and sadism constantly present in the minds of uninformed and irresponsible people. We have to recognize the danger to the whole world in the fact that today the economic life of the more highly-developed nations is centered largely on the production of weapons, missiles and other engines of destruction. We have to consider that hate propaganda, and the consistent nagging and baiting of one government by another, has always inevitably led to violent conflict. We have to recognize the implications of voting for politicians who promote policies of hate.

*From "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility"*
*February 9, 1962*

## The World

IS the world a problem? . . .

I want to make clear that I speak not as the author of *The Seven Storey Mountain,* which seemingly a lot of people have read, but as the author of more recent essays and poems which apparently very few people have read. This is not the official voice of Trappist silence, the monk with his hood up and his back to the camera, brooding over the waters of an artificial lake. This is not the petulant and uncanonizable modern Jerome who never got over the fact that he could give up beer. (I drink beer whenever I can lay hands on any. I love beer, and, by that very fact, the world.) This is simply the voice of a self-questioning human person who, like all his brothers, struggles to cope with turbulent, mysterious, demanding, exciting, frustrating, confused existence in which almost nothing is really predictable, in which most definitions, explanations and justifications become incredible even before they are uttered, in which people suffer together and are sometimes utterly beautiful, at other times impossibly pathetic. In which there is much that is frightening, in which almost everything public is patently phony, and in which there is at the same time an immense ground of personal authenticity that is right there and so obvious that no one can talk about it and most cannot even believe that it is there. . . .

The world cannot be a problem to anyone who sees that ultimately Christ, the world, his brother and his own inmost ground are made one and the same in grace and redemptive love. If all the current talk about the world helps people to discover this, then it is fine. But if it produces nothing but a whole new divisive gamut of obligatory positions and "contemporary answers" we might as well forget it. The world itself is no problem, but we are a problem to ourselves because we are alienated from ourselves, and this alienation is due precisely to an inveterate habit of division by which we break reality into pieces and then wonder why, after we have manipulated the pieces until they fall apart, we find ourselves out of touch with life, with reality, with the world and most of all with ourselves.

*From "Is the World a Problem?"*
*June 3, 1966*



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(Continued from page 434) non-violence and brotherhood are basic beliefs. There is a strong back-to-the-tribe or ahead-to-the-tribe à la McLuhan feeling, which seeks to create small intimate groups of people who can come together as equals in an atmosphere of openness, trust and mutual respect and take active part in making the decisions that affect their lives.

### *Tribal Religiosity*

The capacity for identification, involvement and collaboration makes these young groups in practice, as well as theory, unselfconsciously and genuinely interracial and international. The "I-believe-so-I-am" creed makes for a closer identification with the alien, the deprived, the non-white, even the peasant in Vietnam. The current Broadway production "Hair," a tribal love-rock musical, celebrates exuberantly what it's all about. It is searingly anti-war, anti-dishonesty, pro-life, pro-love, pro-sex, pro-joy, pro-music, pro-color and pro-fantasy. In this multi-media manifesto of tribal religiosity, the actors fairly fling themselves upon the audience in order to put the point across. To see, touch and know things as they are and to expand these experiences into a fused cosmic brotherhood is the point. People as people are very much a part of this whole loving, touching, swaying, dancing, singing, sexing, hairy community. When someone complained that he couldn't follow the show's story line, a member of the cast answered, "Man, we're not asking you to follow anything, just dig what's going on. That's what it's all about. Opening up your mind."

If you can't dig and groove you are likely to miss the yellow submarine altogether these days. George Harrison of the Beatles says, "God is a good vibration. God's in so many ways, just in everything and everyone, but particularly, I think, in art forms where people just do things. This is being maybe pretentious to some people, saying our music is an art form. But it is if we dig doing it, and lots of people dig what we're doing . . . so it's really that every moment's important and just to dig it all and by digging it all you're naturally harmonizing with it, which is a form of appreciation of God." To groove means to yield yourself to the flow of the activity around you, and this includes the ability to receive clashing stimuli simultaneously, a sensory bombardment which is intentional and not undisciplined. Grooving requires a lot of personal freedom and self-assurance and the younger you are, the easier it is!

It is little wonder that young travelers into inner space are not taking their trip with Jesus, in that leaky old spaceship, the Christian Church, but turning on to the wise men coming from the East, as well as such local Western gurus as McLuhan, Ginsberg, Fuller, Mailer, Cage, Brown.

The Christian Church, especially the Roman Catholic, has been so preoccupied with its institutionalism that it has failed to notice that the world is operating on another wave-length altogether; there exists so much repressive concern for dogma and authority that any mystical flights and direct religious experiences which are a valid part of the Church's tradition have all but been stifled. It is small wonder that youths who ceremonially burn money and draftcards, and sometimes themselves, aren't about to buy a dogmatic, hierarchically structured religious system, where money, the law and absolute power, authority have become God. The endless face-saving pronouncements and continual chewing on the old bones of papal infallibility, birth control and priestly celibacy have turned Christendom into Boredom; the strain on credibility increases and increases. Actions speak louder than words, especially abstract ambiguous words, and the do-nothing-Church becomes more and more irrelevant, if not almost immoral by its inactivity and uninvolvement in the world's great crisis situations. Its attitude toward freedom and the individual is archaic, and modern psychology, sociology and anthropology make this more of an embarrassment daily. The new wave of Pentecostals

may quench the thirst of those longing for signs and wonders, and the emotionally charismatic touch may help leaven the heaviness and humorlessness of the Church scene; but only "may."

Small groups and student communities have a chance to cheer on the weary pilgrim if they are given freedom and a sympathetic ministry which is "with it." The teach-preach Catholic overkill, however, is a real threat to establishing any real rapport with the younger generation. At a Mass for students in Boston, it was thought preferable to change the lyrics of Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" to ones with doggerel references to precious blood and Jesus saves. This, if not downright dishonest, is clearly lacking trust in the Spirit blowing where it will.

However, the Spirit will blow where it wills and at the moment it seems to be purposefully circumnavigating the institutional Church, perhaps distrustful of ecclesiastics over 30. But signs of hope are bursting out over the younger scene. Never has a generation been so determined and fearless in its criticism of society, its wars and failures; never has a generation affirmed the individual so idealistically. The potential for truth and goodness and an authentic holiness is enormous.



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# ETC.

It used to be the thing to talk about the Beatles' freshness, their exuberant spontaneity. Those buoyant Liverpool lads. But in a world darkened by Prague and Chicago and Mexico and Nixon, we have to do better than that, if we are to hang on to them. The Beatles, like everything else, have to be relevant.

They're not, though, and they never were, except by accident. They were against politics at a time when politics in Britain meant Macmillan and Profumo, and when politics here didn't matter, because John Kennedy was

*The Beatles:* The Beatles *(Apple, SWOB 101). The Rolling Stones:* Beggars' Banquet *(London Records, PL 539)*

taking care of things. They're against politics now, when the world isn't. The times have changed, but the Beatles go bouncing on. Like Groucho Marx, they are, at heart, conservative anarchists. They see the world as a playground, not as a battlefield.

But they're not fools. In spite of their flirtation with the Maharishi, they don't seriously believe that all you need is love. Nor, *pace* Richard Poirier (*Partisan Review,* Fall, 1967), do they believe the opposite. The Beatles are not ironic. They're irreverent, which is something else. In the song *Revolution 1,* for example, on the new album, they tell us that it's going to be all right—we can avoid all the violence and the hatred. We don't need a revolution. Now this may be right or wrong, but either way it's an absurd statement, if the Beatles intend it flatly. So listen to them. There is an echo of the Beach Boys in their voices as they sing, softly, "it's gonna *be* (shoo-bee-doo-wah) all right . . ." It's not an irony, though, it's a joke. They don't mean that it's *not* gonna be all right. They mean that statements about whether it is or it isn't are all part of that political crap they dislike so much, the real show business of the world, shoo-bee-doo-wah.

Or take another song on the new album, *Happiness is a Warm Gun,* which begins like a version of the music from *Orfeu Negro,* runs through an imitation of Hoagy Carmichael, and ends up in rollicking rhythm and blues. "Happiness," John moans throatily, "is a warm gun, momma," and the rest of them murmur the falsetto backing: "Happiness, bang, bang, shoot, shoot, oh yeah, ooh . . ." America, like the revolution, is a studio production. *Back in the USSR,* another new song, is a joke about Russia's westernization, among other things. Paul sings like Elvis Presley (or like an earlier Paul McCartney), the rock piano rattles—"Moscow girls make me sing and shout/That Georgia's always on my mind." But essentially, the joke's point is wider, vaguer: it's a crazy world, or something like that. What else could bring Stalin and Ray Charles together?

In fact, the Beatles' new album is the closest thing to their films they have done on a record. *Obladi, Oblada* is a jolly calypso about Desmond the barrow boy and Molly the singer. They get married and live happily ever after. Molly looks after the barrow and the kids, while Desmond, unaccountably, takes her place as a (female) singer. "Obladi, oblada," the chorus comments happily, "la-la how the life goes on." There is a very appealing shouted blues, of which the complete lyric is: "Why don't we do it in the road?/No one will be watching us/Why don't we do it in the road?" At the end of an extended rock parody, complete with interminably jangling guitar, a voice shouts, "I've got blisters on me fingers." A straight song by George Harrison is introduced by a Liverpool accent saying, "Ay up." A sad folksong about a blackbird ("Take these broken wings and learn to fly") winds up like an aviary, whistling and chirruping going on all around the tune. In other words, the Beatles don't take themselves or their songs any more seriously than they take culture or the revolution. We don't have to fall overboard for their frivolity, as if it were the only warm virtue in a naughty, deceiving world. But we don't have to knock it, either. Of course, the Beatles are irrelevant. They're even reactionary. But they're very funny. Like Groucho.

There is something else. The Beatles have a lot of talent. There are misses on this album, sure. *Dear Prudence* seems to me a pale business, a hangover from Pepperland. *Julia* ("seashell eyes, windy smile") is a dreamy bit of fake poetry. *Glass Onion* is an in-joke which didn't get out as far as me. But the rest of the songs are terrific, as good as anything the Beatles have ever done. *Sergeant Pepper* was nostalgic, a musical gesture towards the past just because it *was* the past. This album is nostalgic too, but with a sense of purpose and direction. The past here is the Beatles' own—the musical past of their own generation, not that of their parents, or of the old folks they liked. Mr. Kite has become Elvis. Sergeant Pepper is Bill Haley. It's all there, a decade of pop, from Little Richard to Tiny Tim, taking in folk, gospel, country and western, Bob Dylan, Walt Disney ("Goodnight, sleep tight"), the Phil Spector sound and the Mothers of Invention. To say nothing of the Beatles' own earlier avatars. It's as if they had chosen to take possession of their kingdom, run up an inventory of what belongs to them—and belongs to us all, since pop has become so popular. It's a survey of styles, like a chapter from Joyce's *Ulysses,* and done with something of Joyce's energy. It's music by very talented people having a ball, and I'm not sure what else we have a right to ask for. Originality? We're entitled to a rest from that.

The Rolling Stones are like the Beatles' uncouth, troublesome shadows, dogging them like a conscience. The



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Beatles give a musical party, the Stones hold a beggars' banquet—the title of their new album. The Beatles romp around their culture, the Stones insist on realities: factories, riots, sex, betrayal. A prodigal son, in a folk-style song of that name leaves home, as prodigal sons tend to. But when he is offered a job feeding swine, he decides that that's not the way to get along, and goes back to his dad, who joyfully kills the fatted calf. *Stray Cat Blues* is about a very knowing very sexy young girl ("Bet your momma don't know that you scratch like that") and a not too scrupulous young man ("I presume that you're 15-years-old/But I don't want your ID"), and this is where the Stones begin to seem a little less straightforward. They are at once committed and cool. Committed to showing certain things, holding them in our faces. And cool about making judgments. *Stray Cat Blues,* it seems to me, has no views about what it's showing—either about the boy or about the girl. It just shows. Similarly, *Factory Girl,* a beautiful blend of rock, raga and hillbilly harmonica, has a man waiting for a girl "who got curlers in her hair." It seems pretty bourgeois to insist on the curlers, or later, on her broken zipper or the stains on her dress—on the fact that she *is* a factory girl. So presumably the man is a self-conscious seeker of authenticity among the working classes. Good. But then what? Again, *Salt of the Earth* begins by saluting the poor—"Let's drink to the hard-working people"—and ends as a celebration of charity, a frenzied middle-class gospel choir asserting its goodwill. Where does that leave us?

The Rolling Stones owe a lot to Bob Dylan—say the Dylan of three or four years ago. They are angry and baffled, and, like Dylan, they do some very subtle things with a rough blues base; they add bongos, tablas, they slide their guitar chords like an old Hawaiian band. And above all, they borrow Dylan's favorite structure for the lyrics: the semi-surreal historical parade, where tramps, gangsters, grandmas, soldiers, queens and assassins pass like ducks across a shooting gallery. You have to listen closely. When they sing that all cops are criminals and all the villains saints, they are not talking about Robin Hood and police brutality. They are talking about the universal trick, the trap of appearances. Lucifer himself, they suggest in a fine fast blues-rock samba called *Sympathy for the Devil,* is a decent man. So are we all, all, decent men. We all killed the Kennedys, the Stones sing. And faced with our complicity, we do what we can, which isn't much:

Me, I'm waitin' so patiently
Lyin' on the floor
Just tryin' to do my jig-saw puzzle
Before it rains any more.
(*Jig-Saw Puzzle*)

Maybe the Beatles aren't so irrelevant.

MICHAEL WOOD

(*Michael Wood is a frequent contributor to* New Society *and is on the faculty of Columbia University.*)


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**A NAUGHT AT THE OPERA**

# MUSIC

General manager Rudolf Bing's two deaf spots, repertory and casting, were much in evidence the opening weeks of this Metropolitan Opera season. The only novelty was Cilea's sugar-water *Adriana Lecourveur,* which I avoided with no sense of loss. I did see *Turandot* and it supplied me with enough sense of loss to last all year. The high-flying tenor role, Calaf, was cast with the fast-slipping Sandor Konya; his strenuously inadequate attempts to soar left his once sweet voice as coarse as his phrasing. Gabriella Tucci, as Liu, showed how meltingly one could phrase within one's vocal limits. Birgit Nilsson, naturally, was magnificent in the title role. Her thrusting, dry-ice tone is perfect for this cold-blooded part (a Chinese princess who beheads all wooers). She cut through, indomitable as ever, during the big second-act high-note contest when chorus and orchestra foolishly attempted to drown her out. Nilsson would have triumphed even if the Met's ragged chorus had been given the extra rehearsal it obviously needed. Zubin Mehta's new mustache was commented on in great detail by the reviewers so I must content myself with informing you that he dawdled a bit over Puccini's chinoiserie orchestral topping.

Franco Corelli, who is usually matched against Nilsson in the *Turandot* high-jump, didn't go up against her until the Met unveiled its lavish new production of *Tosca.* I do not exactly care for the Nilsson voice in this impassioned role but there's no denying my exhilaration when it rises. unflinchingly, to a high C or dwindles, suavely, to a fine point. I do not care for Corelli's voice, either, but he at least offers me a choice. I have often heard him give vent to three different voices within the course of a phrase. At this *Tosca,* Fernando Corena was a truly comic Sacristan



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and Gabriel Bacquier, a smoothly villainous Scarpia, but for sheer hilarity and evil-doing, no one outdid Franco Corelli once he got what I can only term a strangle-hold on a note, he held it until the melodic line sagged under the weight of his ego. A conductor would have helped matters no end, but Mr. Bing had assigned us Francesco Molinari-Pradelli, who led those portions of the opera that did not feature Corelli as if he expected Corelli to return at any moment and take things back over. The new *Tosca* is splendid, by the way—Otto Schenk's staging was lively and sensibly realistic (until the dawn in Act III broke from two different directions at once); Rudolf Heinrich's settings looked so solid I feared an urban renewal project would be required to change them—yet how can I get excited about yet another big, big showpiece for Puccini? His operas are merely effective accompaniment for sentimental, melodramatic gook. One should outgrow him just as one did banana splits.

Far more welcome additions to the Met were the young Italian conductor Claudio Abbado and the towering young Finnish bass Martti Talvela, who made their debuts in Verdi's *Don Carlo*. It's a worthy but most uneven opera, a veritable roller-coaster ride that ascends unto the heights—then falls off, dismayingly. To his immense credit, Abbado kept things on a high, even plane. While he didn't have quite the snap Georg Solti did, he still got look-alive playing from the orchestra. He treated the singers firmly but considerately. I need not add that Mr. Bing assigned him a mixed-grill of a cast: a bleating-heart tenor (Bruno Prevedi), a hooty mezzo (Irene Dalis), an alternately coarse and creamy baritone (Robert Merrill—who else?), a most artistic soprano (Tucci), and two basses as superb as Talvela, with his rich bittersweet sound, and the enormously endowed Nicolai Ghiaurov, who sings *and* acts with a polish and intensity that are heartstopping. The season simply cannot offer a more exciting example of music-drama than Verdi's great encounter between Philip II and the Grand Inquisitor, as Abbado, Ghiaurov, and Talvela performed it. Would they could stick around all season. The repertory does become more interesting later on.

Fortunately there was no need to wait for satisfaction over at Carnegie Hall. The venerable structure—or, rather, the corporation bearing its name—presented a recital by the great Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau given over to Schubert's *Die Schöne Mullerin*. It drew a crowd so large that Fischer-Dieskau, his self-effacing accompanist Norman Shetler, and the piano ended up as a peninsula of talent on a stage awash in seated spectators. Those in stage-seats couldn't have felt his presence any more than I did, seated in K-23. The voice was easily produced, distinctively expressive, and always first to make the dramatic effect, but Fischer-Dieskau went one step further to actually embody what the voice, with its coloring and weighting, had made plain. He sang the cycle's final transcendent line beautifully, but it was his upward glance of wonder just before *"und der Himmel da oben, wie ist so weit!"* ("and Heaven above—how far away!") that melted the heart. And when he sang the cycle's only line uttered by the miller's lovely daughter, his stance and sudden coy feint to the side somehow made him actually seem to be her! I may make that sound foolish; I assure you, he didn't make it look that way. Can I pay Fischer-Dieskau any higher compliment than to report that his singing sent me away from the Hall welled up with gratitude for Schubert?

The Bavarian Symphony Orchestra of Munich, a richly blended ensemble despite a first horn who plays better than he phrases, appeared on Carnegie's now indispensable series, the International Festival of Visiting Orchestras, with a program of Janacek's tangy Sinfonietta and Bruckner's doughy Fourth. Rafael Kubelik conducted superbly, giving the Bruckner so much line, pulse, and upsurge that it simply towered. I *still* think it's a doughy work, so I can only conclude that Kubelik and the Bavarians are yeasty musicians. The Boston Symphony's opening concert in its series at Carnegie was a bit flat. Soloist Marilyn Horne, fearlessly miscast as a dramatic soprano, plunged into Beethoven's *Ah, Perfido!* and—so help me—the Immolation Scene from Wagner's *Gotterdammerung!* Miss Horne can claim vast stretches of the mezzo repertory as her own. Why poach in these perilous upper reaches? Her voice could remain as thin and rickety as it became in the Wagner, when Brünnhilde was exulting in her suicidal ardor ("suicidal" is good). Erich Leinsdorf shouldn't have allowed this but he, apparently, was too busy glazing over Mozart's Symphony No. 39 with pedantries and trying to enliven Wagner with sheer volume to notice. It's his last season in Boston. I'll not miss him.

HARRIS GREEN

### MAN-MADE MOURNING

# THE SCREEN

"The Fixer" tells the story of a little man who, through persecution and suffering, becomes a big man. Set in Russia at the beginning of the century, when pogroms and anti-Semitism were the shame of the country, the film concentrates on this Jewish fixer—carpenter, handyman—who leaves the village where his wife had deserted him and moves on to Kiev, where he hopes to pass as a Gentile and find steady work. Yakov Bok starts out well enough in the big city, but his usual bad luck returns: a little boy is killed, and Yakov is falsely accused of the crime of ritual murder. Although he is never formally charged (the slim evidence is only circumstantial), Yakov is imprisoned and becomes the victim of anti-Semitic prejudice and the gov-



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ernment's anxiety to involve all Jewry in the crime. As time passes in his filthy cell, Yakov undergoes repeated mental and physical cruelties and indignities from his captors—but he refuses to "confess" to a crime he did not commit.

Alan Bates deserves major credit for making this overpowering lead role believable. Yakov is a simple man without interest in religion or politics; but Bates succeeds in making him a man of some intelligence, a man of great spirit and will to survive. Director John Frankenheimer rates applause, too, for Bates' strong and sensitive performance and for many of the other good portraits done by the large cast, especially Dirk Bogarde as Yakov's kindly defense lawyer, Ian Holm as the prosecuting attorney, Georgia Brown as the murdered child's mother, and Hugh Griffith, David Warner, Elizabeth Hartman and Carol White. The variety of English accents didn't bother me, but I do wish the script, written by Dalton Trumbo from Bernard Malamud's novel, were stronger and on a higher level for such worthy subject matter. "The Fixer" was photographed in color in Hungary, and the crowd shots of extras in the outdoor scenes, especially the inspiring finale when Yakov walks into the courthouse, are very moving.

My only real row with the picture is in the repeated scenes of the brutalities suffered by Yakov in prison. No doubt some of these are necessary to convey the man's determination to survive and prove his innocence. But director Frankenheimer and scriptwriter Trumbo seem to forget that our reading about man's inhumanity to man in Malamud is quite different from seeing it visualized in the realistic cinema medium. What *we* mustn't forget, however, is that "The Fixer" is based on an actual case from history. Perhaps if man is going to rise above his worst behavior, we must not avert our eyes from this behavior. As a hymn celebrating the survival of the human spirit, "The Fixer" is in a class by itself. It ends with: "The name is Yakov Bok, an innocent man, a Jew, also your brother."

It is a fascinating idea to remake "The Informer" with an all-Negro cast; and on the whole producer-director Jules Dassin has done a very good job of it. The screenplay, written by Dassin, Ruby Dee and Julian Mayfield, is supposedly based on Liam O'Flaherty's novel about an Irish revolutionary who betrays one of his fellow members; those who remember the famous John Ford movie will find touches of Ford in the Dassin film, which is called "Uptight." It would be a waste of time to list the differences and similarities in the two pictures. Some 30 years have passed since Ford startled audiences with "The Informer." Movie making has changed during those years. The Dassin opus stresses the presentation of blacks as blacks-as-people with their virtues, vices, good ideas and bad ideas. At times this emphasis on showing Negroes as they are gets in the way of the story line about Tank



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(Julian Mayfield), an ex-steel worker who now hits the bottle and is kicked out of his militant committee because its head (Raymond St. Jacques) realizes drunken Tank might reveal their membership and secrets. In desperation, confusion, anger, Tank informs the police on the whereabouts of Johnny (Max Julien), who killed a guard during a robbery. In spite of one's disliking Tank, one has to sympathize with him later when, filled with remorse, he says, "In the whole world, there's no one to tell me why I did it."

"Uptight" does what it sets out to do and it shows the good and bad in the blacks. Its most interesting scenes in connection with black Americans' rights are those in the militants' committee room where St. Jacques argues for violence with the non-violence leader (Frank Silvera) and bitterness mounts as they get farther and farther apart. At times this part of the film becomes an exposition on blacks-versus-blacks, and the main plot gets lost. The performances throughout are excellent in this large cast which also includes Ruby Dee, as a widow who works as a prostitute to support her children, and Roscoe Lee Browne, as a shady character who sums himself up with, "Nigger, informer—and faggot."

Jules Dassin's production is stunning. I should, however, have preferred that the film's beautiful photography of Cleveland were in black-and-white instead of Technicolor. So lovely are some of the shots that one is more aware of their planned artiness than of their meaning in the picture. The shots of the steel mills to which Tank returns because they are his only god are gorgeous. But surely a fact-and-character-crowded movie like "Uptight" means to say more than this. PHILIP T. HARTUNG

# BOOKS

## *The Johannine years—ecumenical Camelot*

### *John XXIII and American Protestants*

EUGENE C. BIANCHI

*Corpus, $6.95*

**MARTIN E. MARTY**

The graffiti collectors tell us that "Nostalgia isn't what it used to be." Midcareer ecumenists would have to agree. Already they have their concept of "the good old days"—the Johannine years and Vatican II—but it is no longer much fun to look back to them. So many dreams have died, so many hopes have been unfulfilled that it hurts even to recall them.

Those good old days could never have extended as far back as the time of Pius XII. Few Protestants cheered his career or cried at his death. Five years later, after John XXIII, a 450-year course in Western Christianity and world history had been re-directed. Vatican Council II was the event that stamped John's person on the mind. One could be Protestant and amid the relics of the old Christianity he could stand in Rome, yes, in *Rome,* and hope. The years were full of evangelical prospect and men of good will did their work for the world. All could identify the bad men, but few needed to worry about them. Their days were numbered. *Aggiornamento* was part of a spirit that could not be thwarted.

Protestants have not lapsed back into hostility nor have they experienced it from Catholics. Ecumenical interaction is here to stay. The question since John's death has come to be, for many: is the whole Church able to be rescued or worth rescuing? Maybe in such a time of anomie and chaos it is worth reminiscing. Eugene Bianchi's book is one of the best occasions for a backward glance. Its dissertational character and slightly dull and predictable outline are overcome by the clean narrative line, the simple plot, and the colorful language of the cantankerous Protestant periodical editors on whom Bianchi draws for citations.

Phase one tells the whole world how stupid we American Protestants once were. If nothing else, it ought to keep more people from engaging in prediction. The Protestant editors and authors (one wishes Bianchi could have quoted some "men on the street," too) expected little from Pope John and prophesied that nothing good could come from him. Bianchi has culled his documentation from a very fair sample of conservative-through-liberal writings, and the authors are virtually unanimous. Rome never changes. It might die, but it won't change.

The second phase demanded a second look on the part of all. Curiously, many of those who had had the heaviest investment in the project of fault-finding were most ready to correct themselves. The empirical evidence for change was too dramatic for one to deny it and still to claim intelligence or acumen. The Protestant liberals who became more enthusiastic were, of course, charged with having become "soft on Catholicism" by those who had vested interests in presenting Catholicism in a negative light. But at this stage there was a convergence of Protestant sentiment, and heroes and villains blended.

Now, years later, in phase three, the still separated churches ought to be free to face the remaining theological and ecclesiastical issues which separated them. Bianchi outlines these matters in a last chapter. Churchmen, by and large, are not preoccupied with these themes. Catholic and Protestant theolo-



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gians today share the same concerns with each other, but these are not the ones left over from Catholic-Protestant polemics, 1517-1965. Party lines run through, not between the separate churches. And Catholicism is undergoing a crisis of authority, believability and purpose much deeper than that occasioned by the Reformation.

Now and then Protestants will still rear up over a residual church-state issue, if only to distract attention from their own tax exemptions. When the Pope acts retrogressively, as they see it, on birth control, many Protestants will mourn or be enraged not over the ecumenical setback but over the problem of world population and hunger. What impresses me in reading Bianchi's early chapters is this: *not one* of the doctrines or practices of old Rome that once worried Protestants is exempt from internal Catholic criticism today. Give me time and I think I could prove that criticism of vestigial old-Roman teaching and practice is more bitter and noisy now from within than it was then from without. Family squabbles are always most painful. Maybe that is why so few of the Protestant negative writings look or sound shocking today. We hear similar words today from within Catholic parishes, seminaries and interest cells.

Bianchi has been faulted for having made too much of a personality-cult in documenting change. Yet people do make great and sudden social changes around symbols and catalytic persons, and John XXIII served to dramatize what would otherwise have been a slow and subtle process. And the author does show how other men, especially President Kennedy, helped make it possible to pass through the years of Ecumenical Camelot.

The Johannine years proved that history could be full of surprises, that events could defy prediction. Now when drift and despair cover so much of the Christian world and the societies we know, it may be necessary to be reminded of that.

Bianchi's book makes bittersweet reading today, but that taste is better than most we can hope for.

## *Conversations On The Good Uses Of Freedom*

JEAN GRENIER

*Identity Press, $3.75*

**RONALD CHRIST**

The cover of this book is an "Op" art portrait of the author: a photograph comprised of varying-sized black and white squares and circles arranged at varying intervals of black and white spaces. There is no background, no foreground, only the plane of the picture. Yet as you look at it, Grenier emerges or recedes, depending on the angle of your vision, the degree to which you squint. He is least clear when you simply look at him, straight on, with open eyes.

The cover design is an indication of the intelligence with which this book has been prepared and translated. The shifting optical illusion is coordinate with the process of the author's style, the method of his argument. For just as the "Op" effect is a synthesis of conflicting planes, so the book itself is a series of differing arguments, complementary and contradictory propositions, which somehow compose without destroying the discord of parts or eliminating the alternatives. Inevitably, the basic operation of Grenier's style and method is questioning—followed by multiple, often clashing answers. (Pascal, he notes, had two teachers, one who came after the other, the first to teach science, the second to teach scorn for science.) Therefore this book, as the title of the first section suggests, is a series of pros and cons, and Grenier's method, one of the oldest pedagogies in the world, is latent in that familiar verbal formula "pro *and* con"—not, significantly, "pro *vs.* con."

Grenier's argument is anti-Existential. He is in distrust of action, reasoning that once man has acted, man is obviously no longer free. He is in distrust of commitment, saying: "He who believes in a value with his whole heart is by the same token an enemy of freedom. He who loves freedom above all, either denies all values or adheres to them only temporarily." For example, we are visually free only while we perceive the faces of Grenier in process on the cover. Once we enforce a stasis, once we select one image as the right one, we destroy our potentiality for freedom. Thus, for Grenier, André Gide exhalts freedom because Gide commits himself in each of his books, but changes the commitment each time so that he "remains free, and this constitutes the constant within his soul—the fixed point in this endlessly shifting problem."

It is that still point of the turning wheel that Grenier seeks, the resolutely vacillating, the interminable series as expression of the free, unmoving self: "I will continue to retain that precious freedom only if I do not make use of it. That is to say, only if I leave the bother of guiding myself to every conceivable kind of fortuity." *Laissez-faire*, therefore, is the key to both the organization and the philosophy of this book. Grenier traces his philosophy to Taoism, and with the Beatles he could sing "Turn off your mind, relax, and float down stream"; but his imagery is not always Eastern and he can allude to Scripture for his purpose: "Things arrange themselves; it is enough that we do not interfere. The basic principle of action, then, will be abstention from action, just as indifference was the basic principle for thought. It is not any more difficult to rule a great empire than it is to fry a few fish on a stove. It is the morality of the lily field."

You will want to read this book, if for no other reason, because Grenier, now Professor of Esthetics at the Sorbonne, was Camus' teacher, a teacher from whom Camus received a gift of freedom. In a preface he wrote for Grenier's *Les Iles,* Camus explains: "I do not owe Grenier any certitudes which he could not or did not want to give. But I do owe him, on the contrary, a doubt which will never end, and which has prevented me from being a humanist in the sense the word has these days, that is to say, a man blinded by constricted ideas of what is true."

There are at least two other reasons why you should read this book. The first is literary. Camus has fallen



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so largely into the hands of the philosophers, the arguers, that we no longer perceive his work as fiction. The work of his teacher, however, is always reminding us of its literary quality. In the *Conversations* you will discover a man with a genius for brilliant, eccentric quotation no less revelatory than that of Eliot or Borges. The *laissez-faire* of the book translates itself into a seeming disorder, like that of scattered books in a study: Grenier picks one up for a moment, reads a line or two, comments, and then drops it as he moves on to other considerations. You will also find in the *Conversations* a wealth of anecdote and aphorism and seeming off-the-subject observations worth the volume itself: "Has anyone noticed how, after a few hours, solitude becomes peopled solitude, and we are no longer alone?"

Finally, read the *Conversations* in order to talk of them, to give them to all "activists," especially the young. I want to renew Carlyle's remark about Byron and Goethe for our time: Close your Sartre; open your Grenier. In our situation—however you look at it—any author who can say, without reference to either military or economic war, that running an empire is as easy as frying fish on a stove, is an indispensable author.

### *Music and People*

NED ROREM

*George Braziller, $5.95*

**HARRIS GREEN**

Ned Rorem is scraping the bottom of a barrel that contained sour-grapes vintage. His first book, *Pdris Diary,* made far more stir than his music ever had. Reviewers were embarrassed by its narcissistic musings and frank accounts of trouble with liquor and boys, but by the time *New York Diary* appeared with similar revelations, the standard reaction was admiration. Rorem was, after all, telling everything. Indeed he was; unfortunately it was all about Rorem.

Having learned everything about Rorem, I willingly let his *Music from Inside Out*, a collection of essays, go unread. If *Music and People*, another collection, does nothing else, it will surely boost sales of *Music from Inside Out.* It is such obvious skim milk that the other must be the cream. I can see its entry in the *Diary*:

"Another grey miasmic Manhattan day but brightened adorably by dear George, demanding more grist for his publishing mill. Can I stand the agony of another book? (Remaindered—horrid word! I'll soon be the Duke of Marboro's.) George will take anything: my 8-year-old piece on Bill; my *pensées* on fashion for *Vogue*; record reviews. I insisted on epigraphs for each chapter but now I regret it. How can I choose them with last weekend still clutching my poor heart. The death of love leads surely to the love of death. Darkness has fallen outside like soot. I no longer can see my reflection."

A large section of dear *Diary* got rammed into *Music and People* and a good thing, too, for it gives one a fascinating report on the conception, gestation, and stillborn delivery at City Center of his opera, *Miss Julie*. The only thing rarer than seeing Rorem as a functioning composer is finding him a reliable critic. His constant praise for his friends is suspect. His enthusiasm for the Beatles veers from 21-gun salutes ("the artful tradition of great song has been transferred from elite domains") to a petulant whimper ("the fact is, I'm already wearying of the Beatles, resenting the pompous elation their efforts effect in the hearts of my friends"). Where, now, all those jolly comparisons to Schumann and Poulenc? The boys have returned to the big bad beat in their latest *lied,* "Revolution." One should expect such peculiar and fleeting partisanship from a composer who could exclaim, "How I hate Berlioz! Beethoven I don't 'enjoy' (i.e., need)" or emit, as if they were swamp gas, pale exhalations like, "Civilization, to my way of thinking, implies boredom."

The Rorem cattiness can deliver a fatal scratch only when the victim is particularly vulnerable. I envy him his dismissal of Princeton's computerized composer, Dr. Milton Babbitt, who "not surprisingly gives the impression that whoever doesn't think as he does doesn't exist," but often with Rorem, one cannot tell whether a judgment flows from pure or polluted sources. Does he swipe so often at dour Susan Sontag because of her faddish, permissive esthetics or because she attended a performance of one of his works "with that enigmatic smile beneath a yard of tresses" and "offered" to his "achingly expectant ears no comment whatsoever"? Did he reprint excerpts from the critics' dismissals of *Miss Julie* because he was compelled by frankness or by masochism?

One of the best things about his final essay "Where Is Our Music Heading?"—it also has perception, wit, and charm to recommend it—is its being laced with pity for something other than Ned Rorem. Music is, indeed, in pitiful shape as a creative art (it could be in better shape as a performing, or re-creative, art but it is still a source of pleasure). The great composer is so much more rare today than ever that the breed seems practically extinct. Do I lack hope? Have I no faith? Rorem has an abundance of each, as he reveals in an all-too-characteristic passage earlier in the book: "I still place hope in nearly

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**REVIEWERS**

MARTIN E. MARTY, an associate editor of *The Christian Century*, is the author of *The Place of Bonhoeffer* (Association Press).

RONALD CHRIST is an assistant professor of English at Manhattan College.

HARRIS GREEN writes occasional music criticism for these pages.

BERNARD MURCHLAND edited *The Meaning of the Death of God* (Random House).

JOSEPH MCLELLAN, a former editor at *The Pilot*, is presently on the staff of Religious News Service.

RICHARD B. SALE teaches in the English Department at North Texas State University.

ROBERT BELA WILHELM is Director of Religious Education at San Jose State College in California.



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any passerby, wondering could you love me, do you (you do) without knowing it? I still put faith in almost every new encounter, wondering. Yet they all collapse . . . because we won't learn to adore each other's differences."

Anyone would adore Rorem's differences if these were of genius, independence, and accomplishment. They aren't, and since he insists upon payment in advance, I fear that all he's going to compose is another book like *Music and People*.

## *The Temptation to Exist*

E. M. CIORAN

*Quadrangle Books, $5*

**BERNARD MURCHLAND**

"The essential tendency of the modern mind is to pulverize the acquired," E. M. Cioran writes in this first of his books to be translated into English. In that same iconoclastic spirit he proceeds to mount a shattering attack upon our prevailing self-images. In broad terms *The Temptation to Exist* can be classified as a contribution to our growing literature of exhaustion, focusing in a series of terse, apophatic essays on the reality of decay and the pleasures of the void. "The only free mind is one that plies its own vacuity," Cioran says. "Negation is the mind's first freedom." The fruits of rationality are poisonous; action is futile; to breathe is an effort. Indeed, even to bear a name is "to claim an exact mode of collapse."

Cioran's ability to sustain the mood of negativity is nothing short of amazing. All forms of culture and life are weighed and found not merely wanting but repulsive. We are urged to renounce the acquisitions of history (that monster we call up against ourselves) and reason (a sign of vital inadequacy) as a beggar renounces belongings. From Socrates and St. Paul to modern-day America and Russia the odyssey of our dissolution is delineated in detail. Not unsurprisingly, Cioran's reflections grow increasingly misanthropic. He detects self-hatred at the root of consciousness and suggests that man may be the last caprice of nature. There is no doubt that all of this gives expression to the apocalyptic imagination of our times. Some critics have suggested that *The Temptation to Exist* may become a new cultic text for the alienated. We have by now become rather skilled in quoting aphorisms of our disenfranchised condition and are quick to approve those authors most adept at coining such aphorisms. The young in particular, at least important numbers of them, are reluctant to accept the acquired as valid guides to self-definition.

But Cioran is not content to remain in the abyss. From negation to negation he is led finally to affirmation. Just when it seems that no light is about to break, the reader realizes that the long journey through the tunnel has been a prelude to a revelation. We catch the first hint of this when we read: "I dream of the depths of the *Ungrund*, the reality anterior to the corruptions of time, and whose solitude, superior to God, will forever separate me from myself and my kind, from the language of love, from the prolixity that results from our curiosity about other people."

In a chapter entitled "Dealing with the Mystics" it becomes clear whom Cioran admires and what values he cherishes. Mysticism is viewed as an adventure which forays upwards and seizes another form of space and is thus superior to the doctrines of decadence. Eckhart, Silesius, John of the Cross and Suso emerge as the remedying heroes of existential *angst*. Cioran admires their wilful claim to divine status, their vitality and imbalance, especially their madness. By their conquest of a supreme illusion, he writes, they resolve the antinomies of existence. Beginning with the awareness that nothing is, they end with the conviction that everything is. "Contrary to that abstract, false void of the philosophers, the mystics' nothingness glistens with plenitude: delight out of this world, discharge of duration, a luminous annihilation beyond the limits of thought."

In her introduction to this book Susan Sontag says: "What is missing in Cioran's work is anything parallel to Nietzsche's heroic effort to surmount nihilism . . . All the venerable Platonic dualisms appear in his writings." I should argue that this judgment is patently false. Quite apart from the question of whether or not dualisms, venerable or otherwise, can be found in Plato's thought (in my view they cannot), it seems obvious that Cioran is proposing a transvaluation of all values that is just as radical as Nietzsche's. Both belong to that tradition of bold assertion that includes Augustine, Innocent III, Rousseau and Schopenhauer. "We can ascend to ecstasies as effective as those of the mystics and conquer this world," Cioran asserts, although he would want to do so in secular terms, without reference to God or the Beyond. But the dynamics of affirmation are the same in both cases; in both cases a therapy of madness is urged upon us. This is the basis of the author's final act of faith: "Everything which keeps us from self-dissolution, every lie which protects us against our unbreathable certitudes is religious. When I grant myself a share in eternity, when I conceive of a permanence which includes me, I trample underfoot the evidence of my friable, worthless being." Nothingness, he notes, would be easier; but it is our unhappy fate to yield to the temptation to exist and dissolve ourselves in being.

*The Temptation to Exist* evinces a radically voluntaristic conception of reality and as such is not particularly original. It is continuous with a long tradition of religious orthodoxy which views conflict as the metaphysical heart of the universe and values striving over achievement, anguish and tension over satisfaction and the eternal over the temporal. Faith is achieved at the price of negating the time-and-space bound media of our humanity. This view of the way things are transforms what Cioran presumably takes to be a self-transcending dialectic into a self-consuming dichotomy that burns itself out in the pursuit of impossible goals. There is no way in which temporal effort can be adequate to an absolute demand, no way in which meaning can be satisfactorily divorced from the given conditions of our human experience. Hegel-like attempts to embrace the absolute, all autonomous dialectics spun out of



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volitional determination are bound to prove disastrous. Nietzsche's madness stands as an enduring symbol to modern man of that inevitability.

One must, of course, grant Cioran the right to choose madness. That may conceivably be a form of salvation for him. But the imaginative failure of his vision must at the same time be noted. The materials of experience lend themselves to less strident resolutions and happier equations. Less apocalyptic options are open to modern man and I take it to be no small part of the work of reconstruction that faces us all to seek these out.

Cioran refuses to be taken in by our contemporary fetishisms. That is all to the good. Why, then, is he taken in by the oldest of man's idols: that yearning for immutability which Arthur Lovejoy has termed the eternalistic pathos?

### *Faith and Theology*

M. D. CHENU

*Macmillan, $6.95*

**JOSEPH McLELLAN**

The term "pre-conciliar" has taken on so many negative overtones that it must be used with care. When I call Chenu's book pre-conciliar, therefore, I should specify that my intent is partly chronological—to indicate that, according to the internal evidence, the essays contained therein were written in the early 1960s or even earlier. But the chronology of ideas has strange twists and overlaps. Since the views on the magisterium expressed by Chenu are essentially those still held by the Pope and many others, I suppose they must be considered post- as well as pre-conciliar.

Some of Chenu's other ideas are pre-conciliar in the sense that they point forward to the documents of the Council and were, perhaps, reflected and elaborated in them—no small distinction. As the book's translator points out, "if some of the thoughts and insights in Chenu's writing appear banal today they are so because he, with others, helped to make them commonplace." At any rate the impression is inescapable, reading this book in 1968, that it is a voice from another world—simpler, less exciting and enormously less anguished than the world we have plunged into since the Council. *Faith and Theology* escapes effectively from the ad hoc, reform-oriented tone and concern which impose limitations on much current theology even as they give it a compelling urgency. While it seems old-fashioned and only slightly relevant today, its calm reflections may have more appeal at some time in the future when (or if) the present theological ferment settles down.

The author is eminently sound and writes with delightful lucidity on some social questions, though he offers no new revelations. His reflections on other subjects, time and matter for instance, are stimulating. His views on the liturgy, quite a bit out of phase with much current liturgical thinking, may be valuable —for that very reason—as a source of perspectives and fresh insights.

Some caveats are necessary, how-


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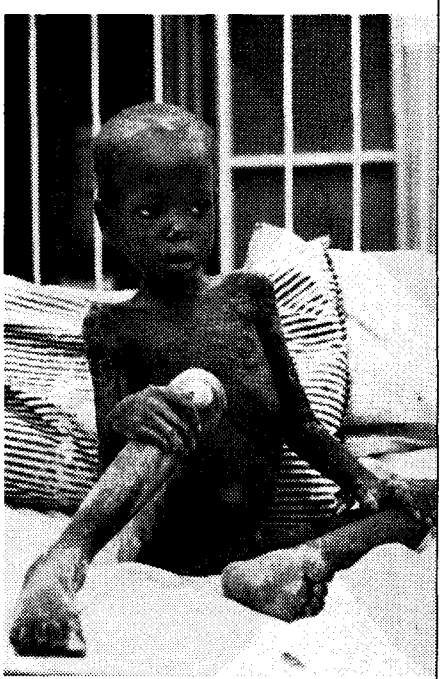

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ever. On the dust jacket, right under the title, Macmillan describes this book as "a concrete theology of the Gospel in action by one of the greatest French theologians of the 20th Century." Without denying him this title, we should note that theology is, for the moment, a perishable commodity and that time has accelerated in recent years.

References to the Gospel are relatively rare in the book, despite the publisher's description. When they occur, they are apt to be general rather than specific. The author is much more concerned with philosophical and theological traditions in the Church than with Scripture—particularly the Thomist tradition of which he is a devoted though not a rigid or exclusive follower.

If the book contains "a theology," which I take to mean a single, integrated and inclusive system that touches all basic theological concerns, that theology must be worked out by inference; it is not explicitly presented. *Faith and Theology* reads like a collection of occasional essays. They reflect a single mind and a characteristic set of thought processes, to be sure, but not a single entity that could be called "a theology."

It may be unfair, but surely it is inevitable that thoughts set down in one context will be read in another. Thus, in the current situation of the Church in the United States, a potential reader of Chenu should know the views on magisterium in his article, "The Relationship between the Theologians and the Bishops." Much of his thinking on the subject seems ambivalent. He offers a series of dicta and distinctions that often border on paradox and include some curious, inverted expressions. For instance: "The work of the theologian is not exhausted by obedience to authority."

Despite some criticism of arbitrary exercise of authority, however, Chenu concludes, in effect, that the theologian may choose the route he wishes to travel but the hierarchy decides where he will arrive. Just as his article on liturgy bypasses lay participation, Chenu's article on doctrine ignores the possibility that the Spirit may speak through the community rather than the administrators. The theologian, for all his freedom in private speculation, remains "the bishop's technical assistant."

"The faithful must accept the formal teaching of the bishop on the principle of fidelity to the Church, but they are free to subject the arguments adduced by the bishop to critical scrutiny," he says. "In the documents of the magisterium, the conclusions are matters of faith but the premises of the arguments are not necessarily decisive . . . Despite the fact that his faith is well-developed, (the theologian) is still one of the faithful."

There is no problem at all, of course, if the word of the hierarchy always corresponds to the Word of God. Hints in other essays indicate that such is not Chenu's final view, but a more developed statement is never spelled out.

I do not mean to criticize the essay for reflecting (with some audacity) the period in which it was written. But the reader should be warned of the pitfalls of chronology.

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*See page 442 for Christmas rates and order form*

## *The Cat's Pajamas & Witch's Milk*

PETER DE VRIES

*Little, Brown, $5.95*

**RICHARD B. SALE**

Readers have known for some years that Peter De Vries was playing the tragic tune in the key of F (for farce). Such music got the full orchestra treatment in *The Blood of the Lamb*, and variations appeared in *Reuben, Reuben* and *The Vale of Laughter*. He has included larger and larger amounts of, to reverse the jargon of electronic music, black sound. But with an important qualifier: De Vries writes *good humored* black comedy. There should be a special category, De Vriesian Comedy, and his new book illustrates it as well as anything he has written.

The book is composed of two short novels, *The Cat's Pajamas* and *Witch's Milk*, unrelated in plot but closely connected in treatment, mood and theme. *The Cat's Pajamas* is the story of Henry Tattersall's principle-fling and his slide from a reasonably respectable academic nut to a would-be then a sure-enough existential corpse. Such identity-seeking debauchery (through role playing rather than alcohol) forces him from campus to Madison Avenue to television screen as a Neapolitan street singer to day labor and finally to handymanning it in the slums. It also forces his wife to leave him along the way. Further, the means of Henry's death is about as Absurd as any in modern fiction: With his head caught in a doggy door, his body exposed to a blizzard, he is addressed for the last time by the Doppelgänger which has dogged his egoistic meanderings.

" 'Well, your end is in sight, Tattersall,' he said. 'I think we can safely say that.' "

But although the jacket blurb describes Henry as "a man whose actions are dictated by vanity," he is a sympathetic character. For he represents the intellectual's fantasy of life devoted to high ideals and the glory of words, complicated by the egoist's nightmare of appearing the fool.

A minor figure in Tattersall's story, Tillie Seltzer, appears as a social worker who meets Henry just before his demise. In a puzzling way, she is a strong, moving person, but her disturbing power is not explained until she reappears as the central character of *Witch's Milk*. In her own story, she is a witch (euphemism for *bitch*), and the bitterness suggested by the title is the death of her nine-year-old son. Her bitchiness stems from her intellectual pretensions and her self-entrapment in the silliness of suburban society. Through most of the story, she considers herself her husband's superior. Pete Seltzer is another word-drunk fool who progresses from a double-talking boor manqué to a funny man, a child-



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like philanderer who, Tillie comes to realize, "had no faults at all. He was just hopeless."

Henry Tattersall sinks into the despair of awareness; Tillie Seltzer sees that nothingness just as clearly, then moves through despair to something better than resignation. She has found her strength by the time she interviews Tattersall. She diagnoses his *Weltschmerz* quickly, telling him of her father whose jaw was once wired shut:

"One day some soup he drank didn't agree with him. He was nauseated, and not with the universe. You can imagine the crisis. Another man in our home town went out one night to a compost heap he had spent ten years building up, immaculately dressed in white tie and tails, and with a bullet from a pistol added himself to it. So I mean it's tough on you romantics. There's always somebody who's gone you one better. You will always be topped. Despair is a losing game."

Like Henry, Tillie too is a sympathetic character. There is pathos in her love and grief for her son, and as De Vries told me in a recent interview, "her bitchiness is in part due to her intense scratching out a place in the sun for her husband and child." The description of the son's death is as deftly handled as a similar death of a child in *The Blood of the Lamb*; De Vries avoids any trace of bathos in what is an intrinsically sentimental situation. Such talk suggests a heaviness that the two stories do not have. Miltonically speaking, the blackness is a light blackness. The blade is in the innards before the pain hits, so entertaining is the knife-wielder.

Dr Vries, however, considers the phrase "black humor" a meaningless tag, often used with *humor* as the unstressed term. He makes Tattersall, a teacher of creative writing, say of a student who writes the real socko stuff: "What she had on him, along with the rest of the class, was that he believed in something once called esthetic pleasure, and that it was the function of literature to furnish it in some measure, and not to beat you over the head with buzzard guts." And, if we discount the most-popular-instructor tone, Tattersall gets closer to the seat of comedy in one of his lectures:

" 'And so we see that comedy deals with that portion of our suffering that is exempt from tragedy,' he concluded. 'For with what does humor deal save with that which isn't funny. Or at least isn't funny at the time: broken bones, broken machinery, bad food, hangovers. Husbands. Wives. Brats. There is no comic mileage in good health, an excellent dinner, harmonious unions and well-behaved children.

" '. . . This principle of contrariety is built into the very bricks of the universe. . . . Socrates rightly said that the talent for tragedy was the same as the talent for comedy. Tragedy and comedy have a common root, whose name at last I think I know. Desperation.' "

Tattersall's author agrees with this, but De Vries' comedy is more than that. The description explains the mixture of suffering and laughter but not the goofiness and grace of style that put De Vries into the rank of Thurber and E. B. White.

Roderick Jellema in his monograph, *Peter De Vries*, called the recurring theme of disillusion, despair, and the loss of faith De Vries' "reverse pilgrimage." These two stories show that De Vries is still skipping down that road backward without a stumble. There are, happily, some rare people who can tell a sick joke and make you feel better for having heard it.

***Nikos Kazantzakis***

HELEN KAZANTZAKIS

*Simon & Schuster, $12*

**ROBERT BELA WILHELM**

In *Zorba the Greek* Kazantzakis revealed a deep spiritual split in his own soul through the characters of Zorba and the young Englishman. Zorba was the man of spontaneous action, a quality that eluded the author; the other was a man of deliberate thought, akin to Kazantzakis' own spirit. And, though he tried to become both characters he felt Zorba's condemnation of the Englishman to be one of himself: he was merely a "pen-pusher." Yet, a testimony to his ability to "push a pen" is seen in his creation of *The Odyssey, a Modern Sequel*. Here, the hero is Kazantzakis' ideal self, both the man of action and contemplation.

However, it took Kazantzakis fourteen years of deliberate thought to fashion his *Odyssey*, for he was at his best as he wrote and re-wrote his materials. It is not surprising, then, that the just-published *Nikos Kazantzakis, a Biography Based on His Letters* should fail to do the Greek the justice he deserves. The letters lack the tempered beauty of his verse and prose and only reveal a disjointed chronicle of his travels, his career, and his many acquaintances. Had his wife Helen provided a more extensive and cohesive commentary, or had Kazantzakis himself labored over his letters the way that he labored over his works of fiction and his travel journals, we would have a record of his odyssey that was worthy of him. In the first case, we would have a conventional odyssey; in the second, we would have


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a McLuhanesque mosaic. Either way, it would have matched the odyssey of his hero, Odysseus.

Nonetheless, Kazantzakis' unity with his Odysseus is evident throughout his letters. His travels—or rather his pilgrimages, for all his journeys were sacred undertakings to him—certainly surpassed those of his Odysseus in both variety and distance. His search for the great men of his time brought him into contact with characters as strange and as interesting as anyone from his own literary hand. And, finally, his youthfulness matched that of his Odysseus; at the year of his death, at age seventy-four, he was still a young man in spirit.

Perhaps his most interesting trips were to the Soviet Union during the 1920's. His record of it here points to the interior strife of a man of contemplation who was also committed to the revolution. "If I were a man of action," he writes in one of his letters, "Marxism would be very suitable for me and for our time, a most rigorous and seminal rule of action. The only one." As a man of contemplation, however, Kazantzakis adopted a Buddha-like transcendence of such problems. As his letters show, he juggled with the balls of action and contemplation, holding on to each and yet not holding on to either.

Kazantzakis was truly an alter ego of his hero, Odysseus. Always rejecting the easy answers, the temptations of Yes or No, he continued his pilgrimage through life. His last journey was to Mainland China in 1957 where he was honored as a revolutionary artist. In a sense the man of action and contemplation were reconciled. Thirty years before he carried on a lover's quarrel with Marxism in the Soviet Union. Now, he had rediscovered the flame in China. He was not a partisan, but he knew where history was moving.

Like most of his works, the last part is the best part. And, at the end of his letters and his life we find that Nikos Kazantzakis possessed a virtue that his beloved ancestors would have been proud of: courage. Threatened with the amputation of his writing arm on his death-bed, Kazantzakis began to practice writing with his left hand!

His friend Pandelis Prevelakis called him a "heroic pessimist" and his wife called him a "tragic optimist." Either was a way of calling him a man who would not be content to submit to the inevitable. Like his Odysseus he shunned the safe world of Ithaca so that his travels were his native land.

## CORRESPONDENCE

*(Continued from page 423)*

And finally, there is the question as to how much our proliferating pollsters affected the results of election '68?

Here again more questions than answers are raised. As stockbrokers have known for years, the average investor will follow the most ridiculous tip and take the advice of the most questionable source rather than trust his own judgment. Among the electorate, herd instinct can also be aroused by pollsters endlessly bleating the names of sure-winners. Not only do pollsters—in all probability—attract uncommitted voters to "leading" candidates, but they may increase the number of electorate "dropouts" who take the view that it is futile to vote since their candidate does not have a chance anyway.

Is it conceivable that 200,000 voters could have been pulled away from Humphrey by the numerous polls indicating that he was hopelessly behind? If so, the pollsters may well have decided the outcome of election '68.

There are additional questions left unanswered by the post-election analyses: for example, is there any significance in the fact that there are now considerably more women voters than men? We know there are several research studies indicating that women tend to be the more conservative. Or was there a significant difference in election '68 made by the fact that 100,000,000 Americans are now under 27 years of age? These questions and many others we shall humbly leave to other analysts of post-election analyses.

WAYNE G. PIRTLE



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The war in Vietnam is not over; the holocaust being rained down on Vietnam and its people continues.
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Young men continue to move into self-imposed exile in other countries.
Division and a nation coming apart seem increasingly to typify the American experiment.

The future does not look promising. Vietnam has and continues to represent a lack of restraint, enlightened political judgement and any significant concern for international law. As members of the religious community we cannot allow our consciences to become dulled, nor our voices muted, by the drumbeat of American militarism. We have only to understand the implication of the following to frighten ourselves into a psychic Armageddon.

- The United States continues to supply military *matériel* and American "advisors" in such Latin American countries as Venezuela, Bolivia and Guatemala.
- Ranking officials of the Departments of State and Defense regularly assure the American public that funds presently allocated for Vietnam will continue to be needed for the American military machine, once the war ends, in order to combat "communist expansion."
- Mr. Nixon has assured the American public of his intention to create an America whose military might will be "vastly superior" to our adversaries.
- The new Congress is basically the same body which passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, with the important exception of two courageous Senators—the only members of Congress who voted against that legislation—Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening.

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II. The American economy with particular emphasis on the cost and development of the American military machine.
III. The Selective Service System, with particular emphasis on the feasibility of ending the draft and securing amnesty for American war resisters.

Lecture-discussions, particularly in areas I & II, will be led by university professors (in small classroom situations) who will bring to their subject matter a reasoned expertise. There will be two or three major addresses by persons from the "Third World" on the *"receiving end"* of the American Empire.

There will be Congressional visits, meetings with various governmental departments and agencies who have authority in areas with which we are concerned, as well as direct action—yet to be decided upon.

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